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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to obtain an overall picture of discipline problems in Scottish secondary schools. In particular, the study sought to clarify what teachers counted as a discipline problem, how Scottish views related to views in England and Wales, the headteacher's role, and how discipline related to other managerial tasks. A questionnaire was sent to 112 schools, with approximately 10 teachers per school asked to complete it. The total sample was 1,011 teachers. A supplementary survey was done 6 months later of all secondary school headteachers in the state sector in Scotland. Key findings include the following: (1) teachers viewed the issue of discipline as central; (2) teachers were willing to consider and to propose solutions; and (3) good discipline and a happy school required joint and concerted effort of all the staff. Generally, analysis of the responses indicated two opposing views: (1) that school and society were out of step and that discipline would be improved if society could be changed; and (2) that negotiation over discipline was possible. Further, the study findings suggest that there are no easy solutions, many schools are trying hard, and a pool of skills and knowledge exists. Included are a technical appendix, 30 tables, and 8 references. (JB)

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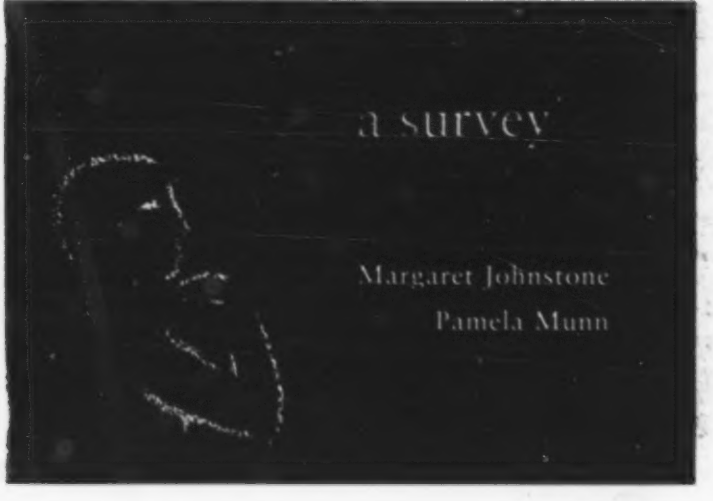
# Discipline in Scottish Secondary Schools

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# Discipline in Scottish Secondary Schools

## A Survey

Margaret Johnstone
and
Pamela Munn

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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Colleagues in SCRE provided help in various ways. Lynne Edwards helped with coding and data analysis. Valerie Chalmers, now at Northern College, helped to devise and pilot the headteacher questionnaire. Graham Thorpe and Lesley Pottie helped with the statistical analysis. Rosemary Wake provided constructive editorial input on content and on the design of the final text. Janette Finlay typed successive drafts quickly and accurately. Catherine Hart was responsible for setting out the final version. Ultimate responsibility for the content rests with the authors. The views reported here are not necessarily those of SOED or SCRE.

The research also involved in-depth case-studies of discipline in primary and secondary schools and classrooms. These are to be published in spring 1992 as follows:

MUNN, P., JOHNSTONE, M. *and* CHALMERS, V. (forthcoming) *Effective Discipline in Secondary Schools and Classrooms*, London: Paul Chapman

MUNN, P., JOHNSTONE, M. *and* CHALMERS, V. (forthcoming) *Effective Discipline in Primary Schools and Classrooms*, London: Paul Chapman

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# 1 The background of the survey

## Introduction

Pupil indiscipline is a problem with a long history. What is perhaps more recent is the public airing of discipline questions and research aimed at investigating the possible extent and possible growth of pupil indiscipline. Our review of research (Johnstone and Munn, 1987) devoted a section to the extent of indiscipline. Attempts to quantify indiscipline foundered on the lack of clear records kept, or on the ambiguity of teacher definitions of indiscipline, or on the focus on 'the worst case' to the exclusion of everyday misbehaviour. On the whole, the tenor of the research indicated growing concern, but quantification of indiscipline proved elusive, perhaps because of the lack of absolute definitions.

In Scotland, the Pack Committee carried out an inquiry into truancy and indiscipline in schools (SED, 1977) which started out by addressing the question of how indiscipline is defined. The importance of the context to any definition of indiscipline was noted as an issue, for example (p5):

> Repetition of an act that would not in itself constitute indiscipline can fall into that category by virtue of the disruptive effect of the repetition.

Although no attempt was made at either absolute definitions or a quantification of the problem of indiscipline in Scottish schools, the Pack Committee concluded that indiscipline was thought to be on the increase, but not to an extent that was alarming or out of control.

In England and Wales, the Elton Committee investigated the question of indiscipline in schools. In this case some attempt at a quantification was made through a postal survey designed and carried out by Gray and Sime (DES, 1989). Some 4,400 teachers were involved, over half of whom were from secondary schools. This survey tried to root responses in what actually happened in classrooms and in schools in a given week. This is both the largest and most recent survey available, and one which attempts to answer the question of what teachers meant by indiscipline by starting off with concrete examples of pupil behaviour. This survey accorded with our own aims, which were to gather an overall picture of the extent of indiscipline in Scottish secondary schools.

Our focus was on three major areas:

- what teachers counted as indiscipline
- how Scottish views related to views in England and Wales
- the headteacher's role and, how discipline related to other managerial tasks.

With the permission of the authors we used the Elton Report questionnaire (making some slight adaptations to the Scottish situation) in our survey of teachers. The teachers who participated were asked:

- to report for a given week the pupil behaviours they dealt with in the classroom and around the school
- to describe what they did about these behaviours
- to judge how serious a problem indiscipline was in their own schools
- to record agreement or disagreement with suggested measures to improve discipline.

The questionnaire was sent to 112 schools with roughly ten teachers per school asked to complete it. The total sample was 1,011 teachers; further details are given below and in the Technical Appendix. This survey, carried out in March 1990, was supplemented by a survey in October 1990, of all secondary school headteachers in the state sector in Scotland. The headteachers were asked a broader range of questions than the teachers, in an attempt to gain a picture of their managerial role in relation to discipline. In addition to the questions asked in the teacher survey, headteachers were asked about:

- what promoted good discipline in their schools
- how the referral system coped with indiscipline
- whether other priorities affected the promotion of good discipline.

Both teachers and headteachers were asked a common core of questions concerning the nature and extent of indiscipline but headteachers were also asked about policy concerns and management systems for dealing with indiscipline, while teachers were also asked to comment on particularly difficult pupils or classes. The teacher questions followed the pattern set by Gray and Sime for the Elton Committee, and concentrated on the negative. This format was inevitable if we were to make comparisons with the views of teachers in England and Wales. In the same way, the headteacher questionnaire contained questions drawn from the teacher questionnaire, to allow comparison with teachers. Headteachers were not part of the sample used by Gray and Sime.

With any questionnaire, people can only reply to what has been asked. It is important therefore to offer wherever possible 'open' spaces where respondents can indicate other concerns that the designer of the questionnaire has not covered. Although teachers and more especially headteachers commented upon the constraining effect of particular questions, the overall numbers of people doing so formed only a small part of the sample. As we shall see in Chapter 8, however, large numbers of teachers and headteachers made use of the opportunity of the last question, to write about their views on positive as well as negative aspects of discipline. Quotes from these free responses are used throughout the report to illustrate teacher and headteacher views.

It is worth reiterating that the chief topic of the questionnaire was in each case pupil *indiscipline*. The implication of this was that replies focused on problems and on negative aspects of school life. This was noted by some respondents in the free response section of the questionnaires, where any other views on discipline were solicited. As one headteacher noted: Best of luck with the questionnaire - but there is a minority out here who want a positive not a negative stance.

## The samples: teachers and headteachers

*Survey one: teachers*

It seemed to us that in order to get a picture of discipline problems in schools, we had to start by choosing schools rather than individual teachers. The most appropriate and least contentious way to select the schools was to create a representative stratified sample of all Scottish state secondary schools. In the interests of confidentiality, this was done for us by the Statistics Division of the Scottish Office Education Department who provided a coded list of 112 schools, that is one in four or 25% of Scottish secondary schools. This group of schools was broadly representative of all Scottish secondary schools in terms of:

- percentages of schools in different size bands
- proportions of the school roll entitled to free meals
- denominational/non-denominational schools.

The headteachers of these schools were then contacted by the SOED and asked to participate by passing on to designated (but randomly selected) teachers the sealed envelopes with the questionnaires. For each school, from two to ten teacher names were selected at random by the SOED Statistics Division, using superannuation lists. The number of teachers designated for each school was in proportion to the number of staff in that school. A total of 1,011 teachers was thus selected. The teacher questionnaires went out in March 1990.

We received 883 returned questionnaires, a remarkably high response rate of 87%. From the replies, it emerged that the teachers randomly selected conformed generally to the overall population of Scottish teachers, save for a slightly higher number of staff in promoted posts in our sample. Of course, these promoted post respondents did not include headteachers; they were in the main principal teachers, with a small number of assistant headteachers. The majority of teachers were aged 35 or more, had more than five years' experience in teaching, had been in their present school for at least two years, had experience of two or three different schools and spent most of their time on class contact. A detailed picture of the teachers is given in the Technical Appendix, Tables 7 to 13. The Technical Appendix also contains descriptive tables of the 112 schools, derived from how the teachers themselves categorised their schools.

*Survey two: headteachers*

All Scottish secondary school heads in the state sector were contacted. The

majority received the questionnaire in September 1990. A sub-group of headteachers was affected by distribution problems and these received and returned their questionnaires some four to six weeks after the main sample. In the questionnaire we asked respondents to consider the events of 'the past week'. The intention was to focus replies on real events, not to examine one particular week of the school term. The slippage was not too serious, therefore. Furthermore it was evident that the views of the delayed sub-sample did not diverge from those of the main sample.

From the headteachers we had a return rate of 90%, a tremendous response to a lengthy questionnaire issued at a busy period in the term. There seemed to be no particular pattern to those who dropped out, as far as we could tell. Details of the headteacher sample are given in the Technical Appendix, Tables 14 to 20. From the schools in the original teacher sample, the sub-set of 112 secondary schools, we received 100 headteacher questionnaires.

# 2 Indiscipline in the classroom

## Introduction

In the questionnaires the teachers and headteachers were given a list of pupil behaviours in the classroom. This list was drawn from earlier research specifying the various behaviours seen by other teachers as annoying or disruptive and was used in the work of Gray and Sime for the Elton Committee. Some of the behaviours on the list were unequivocally misbehaviours, for example, 'physical aggression towards other pupils'. Other behaviours, for example 'eating or chewing in class' were only misbehaviours if the teacher so defined them.

We wanted teachers and headteachers to report on indiscipline which was specific to their own schools rather than to give general opinions on the state of discipline in schools today. We therefore asked respondents to comment in relation to what had happened during the previous week. For a period as recent as this there was little chance of memories being faulty. We also asked the respondents, after they had reported on what had happened, to say 'how typical' the pattern of occurrences they had just described had been. Overall, 96% of teachers and 89% of headteachers thought the occurrences were 'typical' or 'fairly typical'. We can be fairly confident, therefore, that the types of pupil behaviour reported were seen as being representative of routine experiences in school. The list of pupil behaviours offered was not intended to be exhaustive of all possible categories of pupil behaviour that secondary teachers or headteachers might encounter over the period of a week. Indeed, we invited people to write in any other pupil bad behaviour they had encountered during the week and to indicate its frequency. In fact, 10% of teachers added some 'other' pupil behaviour. The 'other' pupil behaviours specified did not readily fall into categories but were individual occurrences like 'spitting at other pupils'. Only 1% of headteachers wrote about 'other' pupil behaviour.

## Teachers' views

Table 2.1 offers a general indication of the reported incidence of pupil classroom behaviour, ranging from the seemingly minor to more serious concerns, as given by the teachers. Caution is advised in interpreting the data. It would be inappropriate to interpret each and every behaviour as offering serious cause for concern. There are indications later in the analysis and from our own case-study research reported elsewhere (Munn, Johnstone and Chalmers, in press) that most teachers are accustomed to dealing with certain pupil behaviours and treat them as a routine part of teaching. Whilst any examples of indiscipline are to be deprecated and are potentially undesirable, it seems that certain 'low level' pupil misbehaviours

are accepted as part of the job and are not seen by most teachers as either serious or difficult to deal with. This table simply shows what teachers recorded as happening in their classrooms.

***Table 2.1** Percentages of secondary teachers reporting different types of pupil behaviours during the course of their classroom teaching the previous week*

| Type of pupil behaviour | Reported frequency | |
|---|---|---|
| | At least once during week % | At least daily % |
| Talking out of turn (eg by making remarks, calling out, distracting others by chattering) | 98 | 63 |
| Calculated idleness and work avoidance (eg delaying start to work set, not having essential books or equipment) | 90 | 40 |
| Hindering other pupils (eg by distracting them from work, interfering with equipment or materials) | 94 | 37 |
| Eating/chewing in class | 85 | 36 |
| Not being punctual (eg being late to school or lessons) | 83 | 24 |
| Making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise (eg by scraping chairs, banging objects, moving clumsily) | 80 | 31 |
| Persistently infringing class (or school) rules (eg on dress, pupil behaviour) | 72 | 20 |
| Getting out of seat without permission | 71 | 20 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 71 | 17 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or 'mucking about' | 67 | 14 |
| Verbal abuse towards other pupils (eg offensive or insulting remarks) | 66 | 14 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (eg by pushing, punching, striking) | 50 | 7 |
| Verbal abuse towards you (the teacher) (eg offensive, insulting, insolent or threatening remarks) | 21 | 2 |
| Physical destructiveness (eg breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabric) | 18 | 2 |
| Physical aggression towards you (the teacher) | 2 | 0 |

*Each percentage is based on the total response given for that behaviour.*
*Respondents who missed out particular behaviours averaged around 0.5%*

Four pupil behaviours appear to have been common classroom experiences for secondary school teachers:

- pupils talking out of turn
- pupils engaging in calculated idleness or work avoidance
- pupils hindering other pupils
- pupils eating or chewing in class.

Table 2.1 suggests that 'talking out of turn' is the only area of pupil misbehaviour that was reported as a common daily occurrence for the majority of teachers. However, there was a range of 'minor' disruptive behaviours which up to three out of ten teachers found themselves dealing with on a daily basis, namely hindering other pupils, calculated idleness, eating in class and making unnecessary noise. This was almost the same as the pattern found in England and Wales, with the exception of 'eating in class', a behaviour not identified in the Gray and Sime research, but one which teachers in our case-study secondary schools found highly irritating.

Looking at what might be more serious disruptive behaviours, one in every two teachers had to deal with 'physical aggression' between pupils at some point during the week. Again, during the previous week one in five teachers reported being the target of 'verbal abuse' from pupils, and one in sixty reported 'physical aggression' directed against them by pupils. This again, was very similar to the pattern reported in England and Wales. In fact, it seemed at first glance that a classroom was a classroom anywhere in Britain, but there were differences in the response. More Scottish teachers reported a daily occurrence of pupil misbehaviours. The most commonly given pupil behaviours were reported as happening on a daily basis by anything from 10% to 15% more of Scottish teachers.

Scottish teachers were also more likely to report the occurrence of cheeky or impertinent remarks than their English or Welsh colleagues. This could imply that the English/Welsh child is more polite or subdued than his Scottish cousin, or it could imply that Scottish teachers are more liable to pick up such behaviour, to feel the need to deal with it. It is also possible that the Scottish teacher has a stricter definition of what constitutes cheek.

This really returns us to to the question of context and of the situational nature of indiscipline. One teacher's cheeky pupil could well be another's high-spirited child. Even an apparently serious problem such as physical aggression between pupils could be descriptive of an incident with which the teacher could cope, and which was, in a sense, not 'directed' towards the teacher or the school. Equally, the apparently 'minor' problem of talking out of turn could indicate a very stressful and wearing teaching situation. As teachers said in the free response:

> The majority of incidents are not serious [but] the constant, repeated minor interruptions are the greatest problems.
>
> Described individually, [pupil] misdemeanours often serve only to diminish the teacher's plea for outside action to be taken. Seen collectively and cumulatively, their total effect is very real.

The picture which emerges from Table 2.1 of the kinds of pupil behaviour teachers met on a daily basis could therefore be worrying. Substantial proportions of staff indicated that 'talking out of turn' and 'calculated idleness or work avoidance' were a daily occurrence. This does not suggest a well motivated and eager-to-learn pupil population, nor a happy

work environment for teachers. As we shall see below, most teachers saw dealing with these behaviours as part of the routine business of teaching and felt that classroom discipline was not a serious problem for them. However, it may be easier for teachers to admit to encountering bad behaviour than to admit to problems in dealing effectively with such bad behaviour. Even if one accepts that 'minor' misbehaviour such as talking out of turn and work avoidance are a natural part of pupil culture - a by no means indisputable assumption - it seems to us to be worrying that during a week's teaching 66% of teachers encountered pupils' verbal abuse to each other in the classroom and 50% encountered pupils being physically aggressive towards other pupils in the classroom. Although daily verbal abuse specifically directed towards the teacher was low, reported by one in fifty teachers, one in five teachers encountered verbal abuse at least once a week. One teacher reported meeting physical aggression towards him/herself daily (this does not show up as a percentage), while another 15 teachers dealt with this problem once during the week.

## Headteachers' views

The headteachers were also asked to comment on their involvement with classroom indiscipline. At this point we should note that the role of the headteacher may have precluded regular or direct contact with pupils who misbehave in the classroom. A low response rate could therefore indicate that problems were successfully dealt with elsewhere in the referral chain, or by an assistant headteacher or depute head, rather than indicate that pupil indiscipline did not occur. Some 5% of the respondents made this point in the free response section, and a handful of people returned questionnaires completed in part or whole by the school 'disciplinarian' on the management team. Of course, in smaller schools it was possible that the headteacher had *more* contact with classroom indiscipline. With these caveats in mind, the classroom problems dealt with by headteachers are shown in Table 2.2.

The first point to make about Table 2.2 is that it illustrates the role of the headteacher as applying weightier sanctions. Serious offences such as verbal abuse or physical aggression figure more prominently in the headteachers' reports of their week. Some less serious or apparently less serious offences also figure, possibly having been referred upwards after repeated occurrences. The second point is that at most about one in four headteachers reported dealing personally with a classroom incident. The headteachers themselves noted elsewhere in their replies that referral systems seemed to be working well. The pattern shown in Table 2.2 supports this assessment.

Clearly, how one interprets Tables 2.1 and 2.2 in terms of classroom discipline is a matter of judgement about what is 'reasonable' pupil behaviour. For some teachers, pupils talking out of turn is part of the human condition and can be easily dealt with; for others, it is a more serious and difficult problem. The pervasiveness of this problem is given prominence in Table 2.1, while the possible difficulty of dealing with it is

indicated by the high ranking of this apparently minor offence in Table 2.2. For us, Table 2.1 presents a rather depressing picture of the conditions surrounding teaching and learning. Although the more serious interruptions to teaching and learning (those generally in the lower half of the table) were mentioned by smaller percentages of teachers, the report that, for example, almost one in fifteen teachers daily encountered general rowdiness in the classroom and one in seven encountered it at least once a week, can hardly be comforting. Reports of direct physical aggression towards staff were rare, and seem to be matched in frequency by direct intervention by the headteacher, indicative of the seriousness of such pupil behaviour.

***Table 2.2** Percentages of headteachers reporting different types of pupil misbehaviours in the classroom dealt with in the previous week*

| Type of pupil behaviour | No of headteachers | % |
|---|---|---|
| Not being punctual (eg being late to school or lessons) | 103 | 27 |
| Talking out of turn (eg by making remarks, calling out, distracting others by chattering) | 100 | 26 |
| Verbal abuse towards other pupils (eg offensive or insulting remarks) | 84 | 22 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 82 | 21 |
| Verbal abuse towards the teacher (eg offensive, insulting, insolent or threatening remarks) | 82 | |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (eg by pushing, punching, striking) | 79 | |
| Hindering other pupils (eg by distracting them from work, interfering with equipment or materials) | 73 | 19 |
| Calculated idleness and work avoidance (eg delaying start to work set, not having essential books or equipment) | 70 | 18 |
| Persistently infringing class (or school) rules (eg on dress, pupil behaviour) | 64 | 17 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or mucking about | 64 | |
| Making unnecessary non-verbal noise (eg by scraping chairs, banging objects, moving clumsily) | 26 | 7 |
| Eating/chewing in class | 23 | 6 |
| Physical destructiveness (eg breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabric) | 17 | 4 |
| Getting out of seat without permission | 14 | |
| Physical aggression towards the teacher | 6 | 2 |

*The total number of headteachers replying was 386*

We followed up incidents of physical aggression towards teachers in detail by reading the free response section of the questionnaire for each person who reported this. There were three schools where more than one teacher reported physical aggression from pupils. None of the teachers who experienced this problem actually described in their free response (if they had written one) what the incident had been. The overall free response from teachers contained seven descriptions of what could be called violent or confrontational incidents. These were written by teachers who had not encountered such behaviour during the past week; in fact

some referred to incidents long past. Two out of the seven incidents could be seen as a deliberate physical attack on a teacher. In one of these instances, the teacher was pushed on the stairs and in the other stones were thrown in the school playground, possibly by persons outside the school community. All of these seven violent incidents had made a deep impression on the teachers reporting. Similarly, those headteachers who wrote about physical aggression in their free response were not necessarily those who reported dealing with such a problem during the last week. As with the teachers, the violence or aggression they reported had been in the past, or was seen as neighbourhood fighting which was somehow separate from the school.

How typical was the range of pupil behaviours reported? It was possible that, for some schools or some teachers, 'the past week' to which people referred had been an unusual or difficult one. Almost all of the teachers and a slightly smaller percentage of headteachers thought that the past week had been typical or fairly typical. We cannot extrapolate from this to suggest that during every week of the school year, one in fifteen teachers encountered daily general rowdiness in the classroom, for example, or that one in five headteachers dealt with pupils' verbal abuse of teachers. Indeed, the typicality of the past week may have been interpreted as 'typical for this stage of this term'. We remind readers that the teachers were surveyed towards the end of what may have been a tiring winter term. On the other hand, during that term teachers no longer had to cope with the potentially difficult winter leavers. Headteachers were surveyed early in a new school year, and may be reporting on a more optimistic 'honeymoon' situation as typical of this stage in the term. Overall, however, the broad picture given by both teachers and headteachers (Tables 2.1 and 2.2) was not seen as in any way unusual by those replying.

## Key findings

- **A third or more of the teachers had encountered these pupil behaviours every day during the past week:**
  - **— pupils talking out of turn**
  - **— pupils engaging in calculated illness or work avoidance**
  - **— pupils hindering other pupils**
  - **— pupils eating or chewing in class.**
- **The majority of teachers reported encountering these behaviours at least once during the past week.**
- **Few teachers reported aggression or verbal abuse towards themselves.**
- **The pupil behaviours reported as common and the pupil behaviours reported as less common were similar to those so reported by teachers in England and Wales.**

- **Scottish teachers were more likely to report common pupil indiscipline as occurring daily than teachers in England and Wales.**
- **Scottish teachers reported slightly more pupil-to-pupil aggression, and more 'cheeky and impertinent remarks'.**
- **Headteachers reported fewer incidents. The most common pupil behaviour they dealt with was lack of punctuality.**

# 3 Indiscipline around the school

## Introduction

What were the kinds of pupil behaviours around the school generally that teachers and headteachers had to deal with? Again, respondents had a list of possible pupil behaviours to draw upon, and the option of adding any other(s). Most of the behaviours offered on the list were pupil behaviours readily seen as problematic in terms of pupil safety or straightforward rule-breaking. Some 7% each of teachers and headteachers gave an 'other' pupil behaviour, generally of a very specific nature such as 'setting off the fire alarm'.

Beyond the facilitative view that good discipline allows the opportunity for teaching and learning, and for the safe organisation of large groups of children, there can exist a broader view of good discipline as an end in itself, promoting desirable sociable behaviour. Among the behaviours on the 'around school' list, there was one which focused on such social behaviour: this was 'lack of concern for others'. This broad and imprecise formulation may relate more to the social fabric of school life than to the organisation of the process of teaching and learning. It is a category which is open to a greater range of personal interpretations than the categorisation of other pupil behaviours. Nevertheless, 'lack of concern' was seen by many of the teachers who wrote a free response as an important element underlying general indiscipline. As one teacher put it:

> At home, children expect to come first in the life of the family and in school many of them behave in a selfish, uncaring way, with no idea of consideration for others.

This emphasis on showing concern, thinking of others and behaving as a member of a social group was found in all our case-study secondary schools as an ideal element of good discipline.

The list of pupil behaviours presented to headteachers added two items not on the earlier teacher list; these were 'bullying or extortion' and 'substance abuse'. These were included due to public concerns expressed in the media and in discussion with a small number of headteachers. These were not pupil behaviours identified as problematic by the teacher sample. However, before discussing the headteachers' views, we look at the teachers' picture of what happened around the school, through the behaviours which he or she had dealt with during the past week.

## Teachers views'

In some respects, the picture of life around the school as seen by the teachers parallels that within the classroom. There was a large number of relatively 'minor' problems which formed part of the experiences of the vast majority of teachers at some point during the week. Depending on

the particular behaviour concerned, around 25% of teachers experienced these behaviours at least daily. Again, set against the England/Wales survey more Scottish teachers reported a daily incidence of problems, by about 10% to 15%. The evidence of direct 'physical aggression' towards teachers was extremely rare, but about one in seven teachers received 'verbal abuse' at some point during the week.

***Table 3.1*** *Percentages of secondary teachers reporting different types of pupil behaviours encountered during the course of their duties around the school*

| Type of pupil behaviour | Reported frequency with which encountered round the school | |
|---|---|---|
| | At least once during week % | At least daily % |
| Lack of concern for others | 90 | 41 |
| Running in the corridors | 87 | 40 |
| Persistently infringing school rules (eg on dress, pupil behaviour) | 84 | 44 |
| Unruliness while waiting (eg to enter classrooms, or for lunch) | 84 | 33 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or 'mucking about' | 84 | 32 |
| Loitering in 'prohibited' areas | 75 | 32 |
| Verbal abuse towards other pupils (eg offensive or insulting remarks) | 75 | 24 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 70 | 22 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (eg by pushing, punching, striking) | 67 | 11 |
| Leaving school premises without permission | 44 | 10 |
| Physical destructiveness (eg breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabrics) | 32 | 4 |
| Verbal abuse towards you (the teacher) | 15 | 1 |
| Physical aggression towards you (the teacher) | 1.5 | 0 |

*Each percentage is based on the total response given for that behaviour.*
*Respondents who missed out particular behaviours averaged around 0.6%*

The high frequency with which teachers reported 'lack of concern for others' and 'persistent infringement of the schools rules' gives the impression that most if not all schools are fields of conflict between pupils and staff. As a corrective to this, we would add that in the free response about 17% of those writing (103 teachers) made the point that:

> There is a small group of pupils known to all staff, who are badly behaved and have a pernicious effect.
>
> A significant minority of our pupils are consistently badly behaved, not only towards teachers but towards each other.

In other words, the high frequency rate of 'lack of concern' or 'persistent rule infringement' may reflect the behaviour of only some of the pupils, a minority of the school population (see Chapter 8 for more details). We can only speculate as to what size of minority might be tolerable or can be dealt with by school staff. Again, almost all of the teachers thought that the pattern of behaviour they reported encountering during the past week was typical or fairly typical. We also followed up those who reported incidents of physical aggression against themselves. We found no detailed descriptions given.

## Headteachers' views

The headteachers, too, thought that the pattern of pupil behaviour they reported around the school was either typical or fairly typical. The actual behaviours the headteachers had dealt with tended to be physical and/or aggressive. 'Lack of concern for others' and 'persistently infringing school rules' were noted by fewer headteachers. This was in contrast to the teachers' view of pupil behaviour around the school, where 'lack of concern for others' and 'persistently infringing schools rules' were two of the three top-ranking pupil behaviours. Table 3.2 shows the headteachers' response in detail.

***Table 3.2** Percentages of headteachers reporting different types of pupil misbehaviours around the school they dealt with during the previous week*

| Type of pupil behaviour | No of headteachers | % |
|---|---|---|
| Running in the corridors | 174 | 45 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils (eg by pushing, punching, striking) | 157 | 41 |
| General rowdiness, horseplay or 'mucking about' | 155 | 40 |
| Unruliness while waiting (eg to enter classrooms, or for lunch) | 142 | 37 |
| Loitering in prohibited areas | 130 | 34 |
| Verbal abuse towards other pupils (eg offensive or insulting remarks) | 130 | 34 |
| Lack of concern for others | 127 | 33 |
| Persistently infringing school rules | 124 | 32 |
| Leaving school premises without permission | 121 | 31 |
| Substance abuse (eg drugs, alcohol, smoking) | 79 | 21 |
| Bullying or extortion | 75 | 19 |
| Cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses | 57 | 15 |
| Verbal abuse towards the teacher (eg offensive, insulting, insolent or threatening remarks) | 46 | 12 |
| Physical destructiveness (eg breaking objects, damaging furniture and fabric) | 46 | 12 |
| Physical aggression towards a member of staff | 4 | 1 |

*The total number of headteachers replying was 386*

Comparing Table 3.2 with Table 2.2, it appears, unsurprisingly, that headteachers were more likely to deal with 'around school' behaviours than classroom behaviours. This could be because pupil behaviour in the public areas of the school was seen by staff as the province of management, and incidents of whatever weight by-passed the usual referral chain if they occurred on stairs or in corridors or in the playground. Alternatively, headteachers may have taken a visible supervisory role in corridors, at entrances, in cloakrooms, and may have encountered incidents directly. For example, the relative prominence in Table 3.2 of behaviours disruptive of general good order in the school, such as unruliness while waiting, may indicate the presence of the headteacher around the school, especially at times of mass pupil movement, as a potentially preventative measure. As one headteacher reported:

> ... [you can] forget about good discipline unless you wear out shoe leather yourself.

From the free response we found a small percentage of headteachers making this point. Others indicated that some teachers, usually seen as only a few, were turning a blind eye to pupil behaviour outside the classroom and thus putting greater pressure on senior management to maintain everyday discipline around the school. This was a point also made by some teachers of their colleagues:

> More than half the staff 'see' nothing in the corridors while those who try to do something about the problem hardly ever reach the staffroom before the bell rings again for the end of break.

These comments were not made by a large percentage of either headteachers or teachers, but they perhaps support the general idea that teachers have a more immediate responsibility in the classroom, whereas headteachers either deal with problems considered grave enough to pass on up the chain, or deal with more minor issues when these are encountered personally around the school.

## Key findings

- **A third or more of the teachers reported encountering around the school every day during the past week:**
  - **— pupils' lack of concern for others**
  - **— pupils running in the corridors**
  - **— pupils persistently infringing school rules**
  - **— pupil unruliness while waiting.**
- **The majority of teachers reported encountering these behaviours at least once during the past week.**
- **Few teachers reported aggression or verbal abuse towards themselves.**

- **The pupil behaviours reported as common and the pupil behaviours reported as less common were similar to those so reported by teachers in England and Wales.**
- **Scottish teachers were more likely to report common pupil indiscipline around the school as occurring daily than teachers in England and Wales.**
- **Headteachers reported dealing with 'school' offences more often than 'classroom' offences.**

# 4 Pupil behaviours which were difficult to deal with

## Introduction

Teachers and headteachers reported the pupil behaviours they had encountered or dealt with in the previous week. These behaviours were given to them as a list derived from those other teachers elsewhere had characterised as annoying, disruptive and inimical to work in class. Those replying to our questionnaires had the opportunity to add any other behaviour but no new category emerged for either classroom or school. In Chapters 2 and 3, therefore, we have a picture of the kinds of things that happened and the different emphases of teachers and of headteachers. What we do not yet have is an idea of the problems such pupil behaviour caused. Was it difficult to deal with, or just a part of everyday life in schools which teachers took in their stride and dealt with effectively?

Teachers and headteachers were asked the straightforward question, 'In general, did you find any of the behaviours you reported difficult to deal with?' Teachers were asked to consider this question twice, once for the classroom and once for around the school; headteachers were asked to judge only once.

***Table 4.1** Were pupil behaviours difficult to deal with?*

| | Teachers | | Headteachers |
|---|---|---|---|
| | In class | Around school | |
| | % | % | % |
| No | 54 | 64 | 79 |
| Yes | 46 | 36 | 21 |
| | *(n = 883)* | | *(n = 386)* |

Over half the teachers and over three-quarters of the headteachers in the sample felt that the behaviours they had encountered, in what they reported as a fairly typical week, were *not* difficult to deal with. However, the actual percentages varied markedly, as Table 4.1 shows. Of course, for those who had found some pupil behaviour difficult to deal with, there could be a variety of reasons. One suggested in the free response, by both teachers and headteachers, was the lack of immediate and/or effective sanctions. Another reason could be the difficulty of a long-term solution as opposed to a short-term reaction.

Headteachers had a further difficulty in dealing with pupil behaviours. There was a need to support staff, even although distance from the incident could make it seem petty. As one of the headteachers wrote, in reference to the referral system:

> If one of my teachers comes to me with what seems a trivial problem, I can't tell them to go away, it isn't trivial to them. Not listening would

> destroy morale, therefore I deal with what may seem minor offences on occasion.

This was one problem area, therefore, which might contribute to the difficulty of dealing with an offence. The headteacher had to balance satisfying the staff (and as one head said, 'my staff favour the introduction of *capital* punishment in the school') and dealing fairly with the pupil. This problem could be exacerbated where the headteacher was unhappy with staff approaches to good discipline:

> Some of the most time-consuming and difficult situations involve a very small number of staff who treat pupils in inappropriate ways.
>
> How can I tell a child to behave when he knows and I know of the animosity shown by the teacher?

These comments were infrequent. Few headteachers wrote critically of their staff, and those who did emphasised that their criticisms applied only to a small minority of the teachers. These members of staff were criticised in terms of relationships with pupils or of personal qualities rather than a lack of classroom management skills.

Equally, of course, teachers could be unhappy with how a problem was dealt with by others, if it became so difficult that it had to be passed on:

> I feel the Board of Studies just doesn't want to know.

Many of the teachers who wrote critically in the free response section of the way their school was managed wrote about failures in communication and consultation as much as failures of policy.

The difficulty of dealing with pupil behaviour, for both teacher and headteacher, was complicated by such contextual factors within each school. Nevertheless, we asked whether there were behaviours which were particularly difficult and whether there were sanctions which were particularly useful — or useless. In other words, were there problems and/or sanctions which transcended the specific context and which were seen similarly in different schools?

## Particularly difficult behaviours

Teachers were asked to look again at the behaviours they had encountered from pupils during the past week and to answer three questions:

- Which classroom behaviour had they found particularly difficult to deal with?
- For particularly difficult classes, which classroom behaviour had they found difficult to deal with?
- Which behaviour encountered around the school had they found particularly difficult to deal with?

The specific behaviours which teachers found most difficult to deal with were not in themselves dramatic. Indeed, without the actual context in which the incident happened, it is easy to underestimate the effect of offences like 'talking out of turn'.

## Classrooms

All of the classroom behaviours listed in Table 2.1 were found difficult to deal with by someone. Some behaviours were found more difficult than others, as Table 4.2 shows.

*Table 4.2 Particularly difficult behaviours*

| Behaviour in the classroom | Number of teachers reporting this | Teachers finding this difficult | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | % |
| Talking out of turn | 865 | 162 | 19 |
| Calculated idleness or work avoidance | 823 | 174 | 21 |
| Hindering other pupils | 791 | 88 | 11 |
| Verbal abuse towards other pupils | 582 | 53 | 9 |
| Physical aggression towards other pupils | 436 | 19 | 4 |
| Verbal abuse towards the teacher | 186 | 24 | 13 |
| Physical aggression towards the teacher | 15 | 7 | 47 |

About one in five teachers found work avoidance or talking out of turn difficult to deal with, possibly for different reasons. Aggression actually directed at the teacher was the most difficult behaviours of all to deal with, for about half of those few teachers who reported encountering this behaviour. The high percentage here reflects a small real number of teachers who reported this behaviour.

For difficult classes, about 10% more of the teachers found work avoidance and talking out of turn difficult. Presumably, in particularly difficult classes more of the pupils showed these behaviours, possibly in more extreme ways. On the other hand, more violent or serious kinds of pupil behaviour were not found more difficult to deal with in more difficult classes. This may reflect the small numbers of teachers experiencing the extreme of pupil misbehaviour, or the unexpected and circumstantial nature of aggression itself.

### *School*

Each of the pupil behaviours encountered around the school was found difficult to deal with by some teachers, but on the whole fewer teachers found these behaviours difficult. For example, 'showing a lack of concern for others' was reported by 794 teachers, of whom 88 (11%) found this pupil behaviour difficult to deal with. Verbal abuse towards the teacher was reported less frequently (by 134 teachers); 22 of those teachers found it difficult behaviour to deal with. This gave a slightly higher percentage (16%) than those dealing with the same offence in the classroom, but presumably the difficulty in the school context is the ease with which a pupil could shout and run.

### *Headteachers' views*

The 21% of headteachers who found some pupil behaviour or other difficult to deal with cited a wide range of behaviours. Every pupil

behaviour listed in Table 3.2 as dealt with in the previous week was seen as difficult by some headteacher. The only problem mentioned rather more often was 'bullying and extortion' which ten headteachers found the most difficult of behaviours to deal with.

## Dealing with difficult behaviours

In asking the teachers to report on what they had done during the last week to deal with difficult classes and pupils, we offered a list of strategies and sanctions. Some of these were from the original Gray and Sime questionnaire; others were drawn from our case-study schools, for example, 'noting pupil's/pupils' behaviour on a supervision timetable or behaviour card'. We also offered an 'other' category. This elicited a higher percentage of response than the similar open categories for the questions on pupil behaviour. Some 38% of the teachers gave some 'other' strategy in addition to choosing from the list provided. We will discuss the implications of this briefly, after an analysis of how teachers saw the strategies and sanctions listed.

Table 4.3 demonstrates that there is no magic strategy for dealing effectively with indiscipline. Teachers nominated a variety of strategies as effective, presumably in different contexts. Once again we are reminded of the context-specific nature of indiscipline and the corresponding context-specific nature of remedies. The most generally effective 'cure' was using humour. About one in five of the teachers who had recently 'used humour to defuse the situation' thought it the most effective strategy they had used; only 1% considered it the most ineffective. 'Isolation or movement of the pupil within the classroom' and 'keeping pupil(s) in at break' were other strategies seen more often as effective than ineffective. On the other hand, 'issuing punishment exercises' was seen as effective by only 4% of those who did this, whilst 15% saw this as ineffective.

In general, opinions were divided on the effectiveness of the actions listed. There was no strategy (other than using humour to defuse a difficult situation) which was both used by a majority of teachers and seen by a high percentage of that majority as effective. This suggests very strongly that the effectiveness or otherwise of a particular approach depends both on the individual teacher and the specific context of the discipline problem itself.

The lack of recipes to deal with indiscipline is reflected in the 38% of teachers who added an extra, 'other' category of response. These 'other' actions included contacting parents or contacting specialist agencies, detention after school, completion of class work at home and punishments to fit the crime (ie litter collection for those who had dropped litter). There was another response given here which seemed to be of a different nature, that is 'praise of good behaviour' or 'positive reinforcement of good behaviour'; this was noted by a small number of teachers.

We have no way of assessing how the teachers used these actions, but the mention of praise or positive reinforcement as an 'other' response may suggest that they were both reacting to potential problems and planning to avoid trouble. In a similar way, 'adapting the lesson content to the classroom circumstances' could be an immediate, reactive response to pupil restlessness, or it could be a proactive, planned strategy if the teacher anticipated a particularly difficult class on a Friday afternoon. The broad

***Table 4.3** Teachers' actions to deal with difficult classes/pupils and their perceived effectiveness*

*Note: The figures should be interpreted as follows. Of these teachers (871 in all) who reported using the strategy of 'verbal rebukes' recently, 7% said it was an effective strategy, whilst another 7% said it was ineffective strategy. Teachers could choose two strategies as most/next most effective, and two strategies as most/next most ineffective; these have been collapsed to give the percentages in columns 3 and 4.*

| Type of action and number of teachers reporting its use | Teachers reporting recent use: | | Perceived effectiveness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *At least once* % | *Often/quite often* % | *Effective* % | *Ineffective* % |
| Using verbal rebukes or 'telling off' (871) | 99 | 64 | 7 | 7 |
| Using humour to defuse the situation (786) | 90 | 45 | 21 | 1 |
| Reasoning with a pupil or groups of pupils about their behaviour (757) | 86 | 42 | 10 | 7 |
| Adapting lesson content to classroom circumstances (678) | 78 | 43 | 9 | 1 |
| Isolation/movement of the pupil(s) within the classroom (684) | 78 | 29 | 15 | 2 |
| Deliberately ignoring minor disruption or infringements (636) | 73 | 31 | 2 | 5 |
| Noting pupil's/pupils' behaviour on supervised timetable or behaviour card (587) | 67 | 28 | 8 | 4 |
| Issuing punishment exercises (553) | 61 | 16 | 4 | 15 |
| Discussing with the whole class why things are going wrong (470) | 54 | 17 | 4 | 7 |
| Giving the pupil(s) extra work (406) | 47 | 9 | 2 | 9 |
| Sending the pupil(s) out of the classroom (388) | 44 | 7 | 12 | 2 |
| Negotiating with pupil(s) to offer some reward for good behaviour (327) | 38 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Referring pupil(s) to guidance staff (305) | 35 | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| Removing privileges (232) | 27 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| Referring pupil(s) to Headteacher, Depute or AHT (220) | 25 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| Referring pupil(s) to Principal Teacher (189) | 23 | 4 | 8 | 2 |
| Keeping the pupil(s) in at break (194) | 22 | 4 | 16 | 3 |
| Requesting pupil's/pupils' suspension from school (71) | 8 | 5 | 14 | 6 |

range of actions used supported the view of the teacher who wrote 'There is no measure which can be dismissed.' Of course the corollary of this is, as one headteacher wrote 'My senior management staff and I ... are agreed that there is no 'solution' to indiscipline.' We should add that this was not the voice of total pessimism but a prologue to a discussion of the complexity of discipline problems in a school. Like the teachers, headteachers were asked how they dealt with indiscipline; they were also asked about promoting good discipline throughout the school. We return to this in Chapter 6. For the moment we look at reactions to indiscipline.

As with the teachers, headteachers were given a list of possibilities. This was very similar to the teachers' list shown in Table 4.3. Sanctions relevant only to the classroom were removed and some broader sanctions listed instead, but the core of the list, some twelve possible reactions remained the same. There was again an 'other' option but few headteachers responded to it. Table 4.4 shows the pattern of response.

***Table 4.4** Headteachers' actions to deal with difficult pupils and their perceived effectiveness*

*Note: Figures and % should be interpreted as in Table 4.3. The dropout in response to effective/ineffective was high: 12% gave no comment on an effective strategy, 29% no comment on an ineffective strategy.*

| Type of action and number of headteachers reporting its use | Headteachers reporting recent use | | Perceived effectiveness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *At least once* % | *Often* % | *Effective* % | *Ineffective* % |
| Reasoning with a pupil or groups of pupils about their behaviour (348) | 84 | 33 | 26 | 6 |
| Using verbal rebukes or 'telling off' (333) | 82 | 32 | 7 | 19 |
| Using humour to defuse the situation (331) | 72 | 27 | 15 | 2 |
| Suspension (for a few days) (273) | 68 | 36 | 7 | 3 |
| Contacting parents (318) | 67 | 14 | 30 | 3 |
| Referring pupil(s) to guidance staff (269) | 43 | 7 | 1 | – |
| Issuing punishment exercises (271) | 31 | 7 | – | 16 |
| Putting the pupil on a supervision timetable or behaviour card (268) | 29 | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| Keeping the pupil(s) in at break (262) | 28 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Referral to outside agencies (259) | 28 | 3 | – | 14 |
| Negotiating with pupils to offer some reward for good behaviour (257) | 24 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| Removing privileges (253) | 23 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Encouraging teachers to change their practice (245) | 23 | 1 | – | 6 |
| Exclusion (246) | 20 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Giving the pupil(s) extra work (246) | 19 | 3 | – | 5 |
| Discussing with a particular class why things are going wrong (246) | 18 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Withdrawal of pupil(s) to an on-site unit (241) | 9 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Regrouping pupils into different classes (236) | 9 | 1 | – | 1 |
| Reorganising a particular class timetable (228) | 2 | – | – | 2 |

The three actions used most frequently by headteachers were the same as those used by the teachers though the order differed. Headteachers seemed to have rather more faith in the effectiveness of reasoning with pupils than did teachers. On the other hand, they had even less faith in verbal rebukes. Like the teachers, they seemed to doubt the efficacy of punishment exercises, although almost a third of headteachers and just under two-thirds of teachers had used this sanction at least once during the past week. This particular sanction came in for strong criticism in the free response section from both groups as time-consuming, difficult to apply and ineffective anyway.

Overall, the headteachers used the actions listed less often than did teachers. This, of course, reflects the headteacher's greater distance from the sharp end of classroom conflict, and perhaps also the successful actions of staff at other levels of the referral system. Those actions which were more likely to be the exclusive province of the headteacher, that is suspension, exclusion, re-ordering classes or the timetable, were not seen as overwhelmingly effective, although suspension itself was more likely to have been used 'often' rather than 'once or twice' in the past week. The most effective strategy, nominated by 30% of the headteachers, was 'contacting parents', although this was a strategy less frequently used than its apparent effectiveness might warrant. The question of parental involvement is discussed more fully in Chapter 6. All we can say here is that headteachers saw this as effective.

## Key findings

- **Over half the teachers and over three-quarters of the headteachers saw classroom indiscipline as not difficult to deal with.**
- **Calculated idleness or work avoidance was seen by the largest group of teachers as difficult to deal with.**
- **Apparently trivial behaviour such as talking out of turn could be difficult for teachers to deal with, especially if associated with a difficult class.**
- **Teachers and headteachers used the same kinds of actions in dealing with indiscipline: reasoning, verbal rebukes, humour.**
- **A similar percentage of teachers and headteachers (15-16%) saw punishment exercises as ineffective sanctions, although using them.**
- **The action most often noted by teachers as effective in the classroom was the use of humour, although this was less often used than rebukes.**
- **The action most often noted as effective by headteachers was to contact parents, although this was less often used than certain other actions.**
- **No single action was seen as overwhelmingly effective by either teachers or headteachers.**

# 5 Difficult pupils, problem times and places

## Introduction

Teachers and headteachers were asked a common core of questions about indiscipline. In addition, teachers were asked questions about difficult classes and difficult pupils. Headteachers were asked different additional questions. The teachers gave a detailed picture of the kind of pupil or class they found particularly difficult, while headteachers gave a picture of the proportion of difficult pupils in the school. Headteachers also reported on the school overall, in terms of when and where pupil problem behaviour was likely to occur.

## Difficult pupils and classes

Not surprisingly, teachers found male pupils of lower ability in S4 (ie aged 15-16 years and in the final year of compulsory schooling) the most difficult to deal with. Headteachers tended to agree that S4 and S3 caused most problems for the staff. Difficult classes were likely to have more boys than girls and be of lower ability. Difficult classes could be either large or small; small but difficult classes could well be special classes composed of pupils found individually difficult. Two-thirds of the teachers felt that they met at least one or two difficult classes during the week's teaching. A higher proportion (84%) reported having at least one or two difficult pupils.

Difficult pupils or classes did not behave in a different way from less difficult pupils or classes. There was not more violence in difficult classes, for example. Teachers reported that there was more of the kind of behaviour found in ordinary classes, that is talking out of turn, or work avoidance or hindering other pupils' work. We might speculate that the ways in which difficult pupils did this were more confrontational and that such behaviour was more pervasive in a difficult class. A higher percentage of teachers found these seemingly everyday behaviours more difficult to deal with when shown by a difficult class. However, it is important to remember that, looking at their teaching overall, 54% of the teachers felt they could, on the whole, deal with pupil indiscipline without difficulty, even although about 68% reported that they regularly taught at least one or two difficult classes. It may be that the number or proportion of difficult classes is what tips the balance from coping to finding it difficult to cope.

We noted that 17% of the teachers who wrote in the free response (ie 12% of the whole sample) felt that in their school only a minority of pupils consistently caused problems. Teachers had not been asked directly about this, but it seemed an important aspect of any school, in terms of

working towards overall good discipline. Accordingly, we asked headteachers for their views on the difficult minority.

## Headteachers' views: the difficult minority

The headteachers were asked to estimate the proportion of the school roll which fell into various categories of pupil behaviour, ranging from 'consistently causing serious problems' to 'causing no problems at all'. Most of the headteachers (94%) saw up to a maximum of 5% of their pupils as consistently causing serious problems. In fact, 87% of headteachers saw over half of their pupils as causing no problems at all. This echoed the teachers who wrote in the free response of 'the great majority of willing and reasonable children'. The headteachers seemed to agree that a small percentage of their pupils were visibly difficult, and that a large percentage of their pupils were little or no problem. However the remaining pupils, anything up to a third of the school roll, were more awkward to categorise. Some of this group misbehaved intermittently in a serious way; others misbehaved at a low level all the time. Who can say which of these is more serious?

It seems to us that headteachers were reporting on a very complex situation, and one which might be seen differently by principal teachers, for example. Most of the headteachers (80%) felt that the referral system in their school worked, that only serious offences or the most difficult pupils were passed on up the line to them. Presumably, the varying percentages of intermittently difficult, or consistently but mildly difficult, pupils were dealt with elsewhere in the system. Teachers therefore might agree that only a minority of pupils were at the extremes of indiscipline, but still feel that they had at least one or two difficult classes and certainly one or two difficult pupils. Of course, in relation to difficult pupils, the teachers were reporting only on their classrooms, where 46% of teachers had found some behaviour or other difficult to deal with in the previous week. Headteachers reported on the whole school, and were asked to say where and when problem behaviour was likely to surface.

## Key times and places for discipline problems

Although headteachers did not deal with all indiscipline, we considered they would have a good idea of when and where problems were most likely to occur. Over half the headteachers anticipated indiscipline at lunchtime, in the school playground or yard. Classrooms were seen as a less likely location for indiscipline although surprisingly, perhaps, about as likely as corridors and stairs in the headteachers' view. Afternoon classes were seen as being particularly vulnerable to pupil indiscipline.

About two-thirds of the headteachers had already set up lunchtime clubs and/or social areas for pupils to use at lunchtime, possibly in response to this view of lunchtime/playground as a peak trouble time and place. These headteachers were slightly less likely than their colleagues with no such provision to choose lunchtime/playground as a time/place for trouble.

## Dealing with particularly difficult pupils

As we already noted in Chapter 4, teachers dealt with difficult pupils in the same way as they dealt with more amenable pupils, only they did what ever it was more often. Headteachers could take a broader managerial view, and try to deal with difficult pupils in a variety of ways. This is an area we return to in the final chapter but there are two points to raise here. The first of these hinges on who is seen as particularly difficult, that is the adolescent male pupil of lower ability. One way to deal with these pupils would be to devise a suitable and attractive curriculum, as many educationalists have pointed out. About half the headteachers felt that curricular improvement was well under way but the other half felt that improvement in this area was still patchy. This is not really surprising, given the slowness of any process of real change.

In writing about curricular change, teachers were divided as to the impact on discipline. Two directly opposing views are given below:

> The pupils generally find it [Standard Grade] boring and irrelevant and coupled with the fact that equipment ... is pathetically scarce or non-existent then we have the perfect recipe for indiscipline.

> Within the department the courses offered to pupils have been constantly adapted and this has meant that discipline problems are negligible.

A sixth of the teachers who gave a free response wrote about the curriculum and discipline, that is 104 teachers out of 609. For every teacher who saw curricular change as positive, another three saw the negative effects of change. Headteachers were more evenly split on this, and, like the teachers, gave opposing views:

> I have always believed that we would have better discipline if we had a more appropriate curriculum and the introduction of Standard Grade has demonstrated this.

> Excessive change ... [is] being demanded of the secondary sector: This leads to uncertainty and lack of confidence in many staff, points rapidly detected by pupils and exploited as teacher weakness.

The negative quote illustrates the tendency of headteachers to see the effects of change as operating on discipline indirectly, through teacher stress and lowered morale. In fact, few headteachers (20 out of 224) wrote about the topic of curricular change.

A second way to deal with difficult pupils is to provide some kind of special unit. Those headteachers without such a unit were asked directly if a unit would help their school. Almost two-thirds said 'no'; the remaining third were split between saying 'perhaps' and saying 'yes'. In other words, a unit in itself was not seen as a sure-fire solution to the problem. Social education for all pupils and more counselling for all pupils were steps more favourably viewed by the great majority of the headteachers. The possibility of falling rolls increasing the school's chances of building a good school ethos was also raised by headteachers; about one in three people noted this.

## Key findings

- **Pupils seen by teachers as difficult were male, of low ability, and in the final year of compulsory schooling.**
- **Classes seen by teachers as difficult varied in size but were made up of a majority of male, low ability, older pupils.**
- **Two-thirds of teachers had at least one or two classes they saw as difficult.**
- **Teachers used the same techniques to deal with ordinary classes and with classes they saw as difficult.**
- **Headteachers saw at least half, and usually more of the pupils as well-behaved.**
- **Headteachers felt that pupils seen as difficult were in the minority.**
- **A fluctuating percentage of pupils were seen by heads as intermittently difficult, at different levels of indiscipline.**
- **The peak time/place for indiscipline was seen to be at lunchtime, in the school playground.**

# 6 Priorities for action

## Introduction

Part of both questionnaires was devoted to asking what might be done to improve discipline. In the teacher questionnaire we listed sixteen forms of action that could be taken and asked teachers to say for each whether it was 'needed', 'possibly needed' or 'not needed' in their own school. Again, an 'other' category was given, to allow for extra or different ideas. The headteachers' version of this question differed slightly in content. There were fifteen statements identical to those in the teacher version, one rephrased statement concerning the role of the board of studies, and three extra statements. These three concerned building up teacher morale, and the provision of on-site or of off-site units for disruptive pupils.

There was another more important difference in the options given to headteachers in replying. Instead of simply a blanket 'not needed', we offered headteachers a more defined choice of response; this was 'we already have this' and 'wouldn't work here'. These 'not needed' responses were seen by us as potentially helpful in defining why headteachers might seem to reject certain ideas.

Headteachers were also asked questions about actively promoting good discipline. Teachers were not asked directly for their ideas on this, although some comment was given in the free response section which gave an insight into their views. However, we begin this chapter by looking at actions identified by teachers and by headteachers as steps to improve discipline.

## Teachers' views on priorities for action

Teachers and headteachers gave rather different kinds of replies to the question on priorities for action in relation to problems of indiscipline. Teachers selected a wide range of different strategies from the list provided in the questionnaire. Most of the possibilities suggested had anything from around 30% to just under 50% of teachers agreeing that this was needed to improve discipline. The three actions chosen most often and each given by more than half of the teacher sample were:

- establishing smaller classes (72%)
- tougher sanctions for certain forms of indiscipline (67%)
- building more parental involvement (54%).

Those actions least often nominated were:

- changing teaching styles (16%)
- opportunities to see other teachers teaching (16%)
- changing the content of the curriculum (16%).

It seemed from what teachers chose as their priorities for action that they were reasonably happy with what they were doing, but unhappy about the context in which they were doing it. Teachers tended to agree that what was needed was a series of actions outside teacher control, that is smaller classes, tougher sanctions and more parental involvement. These three priorities also turned up in the free response section, where size of school was suggested as a factor in school discipline. Few teachers commented on school size, but those who did felt that their own smaller schools had a head start in promoting good discipline. In addition teachers wrote about the role of management in the free response section. The headteacher and board of studies were seen to have a vital role in establishing a positive climate in the school.

## Headteachers' views on priorities for action

For the headteachers, the three top priority actions needed to improve discipline were:

- establishing smaller classes (33%)
- more opportunities for counselling pupils whose behaviour is difficult (29%)
- building up teacher morale (29%).

The smaller percentages of headteachers choosing these actions is explained by the similar percentages of headteachers who responded for these specific actions that 'we have this already'. If they felt that this was *not* the case, then headteachers were inclined to reply by choosing the 'possibly needed' option over the more definite 'yes needed'.

Those actions or approaches which over half of the headteachers claimed to have in place already were:

- a review of discipline policy and practice by the board of studies (78%)
- changing the climate or atmosphere of the school (53%)
- firmer communication to pupils about what they can and cannot do (52%).

Strategies to improve discipline were already in place, or the need for them was possible rather than definite. Those headteachers who did say firmly that some action was needed agreed with the teachers on smaller classes and in their free response section the headteachers also discussed the idea that size matters:

> ... in a school this size, if we had serious problems of discipline I should immediately conclude that it was time for me to retire.

School size was seen as an important precondition of establishing good discipline. Headteachers in schools with falling rolls tended to see this as a positive help towards creating a good ethos and improving discipline.

The other possible actions that headteachers nominated were to some extent within their own control, that is building up teacher morale and increasing pupil counselling. This could be seen as a two-pronged attack

on the problem, by encouraging teachers to realise they could cope and by helping pupils rather than punishing them. Headteachers saw a range of actions as needed or possibly needed to ameliorate discipline, as did the teachers. However, headteachers had power in the school to plan the promotion of good discipline and the circumvention of indiscipline wherever possible.

## Promoting good discipline

We did not ask headteachers directly whether or not they had an effective policy to promote good discipline. We offered them a list of elements identified as integral to such a policy, taken from pilot work and from sources such as the HMI report *Effective Secondary Schools* (SOED, 1988). In this list we deliberately avoided the phrase 'having a good ethos' and tried to keep to practicalities such as 'using a system of merit points for good behaviour'. In addition to the list, the headteachers were given space to note any other practical action taken. There was also space for any further thoughts on working towards good discipline in the school.

What steps did the headteachers take? They tried to listen to staff and boost staff morale; they planned social education for all pupils and after school activities; they presented a good public front for their school; contacted parents and kept pestering the education authorities for what was needed; and they personally wore out shoe leather, to see and be seen. All of these things were reported as being undertaken by 80% and more of the headteachers. This could be seen as a gratifying awareness of arguments put forward by the Inspectorate (SOED, 1988). Alternatively, it could be an overestimate of action. There is often a gap between intention and practice. For example, the most frequently given of all the approaches was 'having an open door policy to listen to staff views' (94%). This ideal is not borne out by the 26% of teachers who wrote critically in the free response section of their school management:

> The person dealing daily with pupils has little or no say in the business of discipline. The classroom teacher has no platform/forum/agency through which he can express views, gain support, demand change ... No wonder the ordinary teacher tends to body-swerve corridor, lunchtime misbehaviour!

> Management through principal teachers' meetings removes the majority of staff from having an effective input to school policy-making ... The staff, for morale's sake, need to believe that they are involved in running the school and that their concerns, eg over discipline ... are listened to and acted on by the board of studies.

Of course, what the teacher may see as 'not wanting to know' could be a negative way of looking at managerial attempts to encourage positive thinking and curtail grousing. Nevertheless, those teachers who wrote about their schools felt that a lack of a clear lead or ineffective management was affecting discipline. Some of the teachers also felt that colleagues were out of step in their school, which also suggests a lack of good managerial oversight in these schools.

Other actions offered in the list of possible ways to promote good discipline also involved management-staff contact over discipline. However, under half the headteachers noted face-to-face meetings with staff as a whole, to discuss discipline, as one of the actions taken. A slightly higher proportion of headteachers noted the existence of a discipline committee in their school. It may be that some headteachers had good reasons for not using such approaches to the promotion of good discipline, but it does give the impression that discipline is more likely to be discussed informally with teachers, or in private on a one-to-one basis. While this may have its strengths, especially if indiscipline is the issue, it may imply a lack of a broad and general forum on 'what is good discipline'. Is open discussion a bad idea, a step towards dissent among teachers? Perhaps those headteachers who seemed to have less staff contact agreed with the view expressed by one headteacher that:

> We no longer talk about discipline with staff because we will never reach a consensus. Each brings too much emotional baggage.

## Additional ideas to encourage good discipline

One in four headteachers added at least one other approach they used to promote good discipline. Unlike 'other' replies elsewhere in the questionnaire, these were not scattered and idiosyncratic ideas. They fell into three main categories:

- building a positive ethos
- having a clear rule system
- building a good guidance system.

According to the teacher replies, schools using these approaches did exist. There were schools where teachers wrote in the free response section praising the efforts of the board of studies and of colleagues in working towards that elusive phenomenon 'a positive ethos'. A good guidance system and few but clear rules were certainly seen as part of this. However, the teachers often added that external factors played a very important part. The headteachers agreed. As we have already noted, almost every headteacher of a small school felt that they had a head start:

> The size of classes and the 'family' atmosphere engendered by the small school is most important to general school discipline ...
>
> In this case small is beautiful.

Building a positive ethos seemed easier when the school was smaller, and of course where parents were seen as supportive and as valuing school.

## Impediments to good discipline

The headteachers were asked about specific background conditions which might create difficulties or which might help promote good discipline. Again, a list of possibilities was offered. Almost two-thirds of the headteachers saw conflicting standards between home and school as the greatest hindrance to establishing good discipline. Home-school conflict

was a theme returned to in the free response section, and one which was echoed in the teachers' replies.

As a step towards good discipline, one in five headteachers cited 'broadening home school contacts'; this was the approach most often noted as a positive action to take. However, fewer headteachers mentioned contacting the parents specifically with praise of their children. Hardly anyone saw this as an important approach to creating good discipline. We might add that praise did not feature much when teachers wrote about their classrooms either. Nevertheless, headteachers acknowledged the influence of the home, and the importance of bridge-building between home and school. We looked more closely at various managerial tasks, including parental contact, to investigate how headteachers apportioned their time around discipline concerns.

## Discipline and other priorities

All headteachers have priorities besides discipline. These priorities compete for time and so before we look at how headteachers spent their time, how did home-school contact stand in relation to other priorities? The top priorities for the headteachers were:

- developing a positive school ethos
- curricular development
- building up teacher morale
- staff development.

These were all seen as highly important. Of course, we have no way of specifying what headteachers did to develop a positive ethos or improve teacher morale. However, all the priorities suggest the enormous importance of a committed staff to success in achieving school aims. About two-thirds of the headteachers said they would place maintaining good discipline somewhere among their top three priorities; one in five headteachers saw this as more important than any other priority. Building contacts with parents, although acknowledged as important, was seen by very few headteachers as one of their top three priorities. Why should this be? We can only speculate, of course, but there are practical difficulties of time and of staff involvement to building up anything more than a one-way flow of communication from the school as a whole to the parents. It may well seem a more profitable use of headteacher time to concentrate on what is at hand, the staff and the curriculum, and encourage the development of a good ethos by working within the school.

Did headteachers spend much time on contact with the home? In their own view, no. They saw most of their time as being spent on administration or on routine, general matters. Less than a third said they spent most of their time on staff and on ethos, dealing with problems and trying to encourage teachers. A very small percentage (3%) spent most of their time building up the image of their school, contacting the community and generally trying to improve public perceptions. Only one person felt he spent most of his time on parental contact.

The end picture therefore was that almost two-thirds of the headteachers felt that the home played an important part in the school achieving good discipline but that time had to be spent on the day-to-day running of the school. When this had been done, or when it could be delegated, time was spent on encouraging staff, improving the curriculum, trying to deal with weaker members of staff and generally building up the morale of those who work in the school. We are not criticising headteachers for seeming to say one thing and do another, we are trying to give a flavour of the reality of school administration. Without good and motivated staff, a positive ethos and good discipline are highly unlikely. Without a varied and interesting curriculum, the probability of pupil disaffection increases. Given that even headteachers have a finite day, it is not surprising that many chose to concentrate on the place and people to hand. This is especially true if the headteacher feels (as a minority noted) that society itself has changed radically and for the worse. In these circumstances, the idea of the school as a fortress, or indeed as a haven for pupils, gains currency.

## Key findings

- **Headteachers agreed that a range of positive ideas would promote good discipline.**
- **Headteachers emphasised the importance of home-school agreement to the promotion of good discipline; teachers backed this up.**
- **Promoting good discipline was a top priority for headteachers, but time was eaten up by day-to-day administration.**
- **Headteachers spent more time promoting good discipline by encouraging staff and improving the curriculum than by building contacts with parents.**
- **Headteachers suggested that discipline would improve if classes were smaller, if teacher morale could be raised and if pupil counselling could be increased.**
- **Teachers suggested that discipline would improve if classes were smaller, if sanctions were tougher and if parents were more involved.**
- **About one in five teachers writing in the free response section felt cut off from or dissatisfied with management in their school.**

# 7 How serious a problem is indiscipline?

## Introduction

In this chapter we consider what must be one of the most important questions we can ask of the data; how serious is the problem? Of course, different people can give different views of the same situation. A school might have serious discipline problems, yet the staff could also feel able to cope, indeed to progress. Alternatively, a school might take discipline problems as routine for that school, and judge them to be less than serious. In this chapter we look at the perceived seriousness of the problem in five different ways. These are:

- did the teacher's personal or career background colour his or her view?
- were teachers' views coloured by the type of school?
- did headteachers have similar views to teachers?
- how did Scottish views compare with those collected in England and Wales?
- were some schools worse off than others?

## Teachers' views

Both teacher and headteacher questionnaire asked about what had happened in the school and in the classrooms in the past week, what had been done about pupil behaviours and whether these were difficult to deal with. We also asked for opinions on a more subjective matter: how serious is the problem of indiscipline in your school? About two-thirds of teachers felt that the problem was not really very serious. The remaining third took the opposite view; this includes a small number who thought that problems in their schools were very serious. Table 7.1 gives the figures obtained.

***Table 7.1*** *Scottish teachers' views on the seriousness of the indiscipline problem*

| | Number | % |
|---|---|---|
| No problem at all | 20 | 2 |
| Minor | 140 | 16 |
| Not very serious | 402 | 46 |
| Serious | 275 | 31 |
| Very serious | 42 | 5 |

Of course, this is a picture of what individual teachers thought, and as such could reflect the personality of that teacher and his or her background, as well as the context of a particular department or a particular timetable full of good (or bad) classes.

Some information was available on teacher background. This was explored to see whether (for example) older teachers took a more pessimistic view of the situation than younger teachers. We considered a number of aspects of the career backgrounds and personal circumstances, in relation to how teachers saw the seriousness of the problem. There was no association between views expressed and teachers' age, sex, years of teaching experience and years in the present school. The only small difference, and it was a small one, was that people in promoted posts were a little less likely to see things as a serious problem. Although we might speculate that principal teachers were perhaps more distanced from particularly difficult classes, this was not something which surfaced in the free response section of the questionnaire, where grievances tended to be aired. On the contrary, those relatively few teachers who wrote about their departments tended to write positively about colleagues and principal teachers.

Were the principal teachers a little more optimistic because they had a greater responsibility within the school organisation, a responsibility which led them to avoid negative thinking or destructive criticism? Did they have a broader and perhaps more accurate view of the school as a whole? Or were their sanctions more likely to be heeded by the pupils, because of the promoted status of the teacher?

Whether fairly or not, some kinds of schools have a poor image. Were teachers who saw the problem as more serious also teachers who taught in a particular kind of school? Some relationships between the schools' circumstances as reported by the teachers and the teachers' views on the seriousness of the problem did emerge. For example, teachers who said that the overall position was 'serious' were more likely to be in schools where:

- a higher proportion of pupils came from 'economically disadvantaged areas'
- a higher proportion of pupils were of 'below average ability'
- a higher proportion of pupils came from an 'inner city' area
- the school was bigger.

Teachers in schools which had made greater use of corporal punishment before this was abolished were also more likely to report problems as 'serious'. The background circumstances of the schools (save for size) were based on teachers' own reporting of the situation rather than evidence independently collected. In the main, teachers within any given school seemed to agree in describing that school, but teachers may not always be able to judge accurately their own school in relation to schools in general. It would be unwise to select any one of these background factors as of key importance when the combination of factors and the actual people involved may affect the situation considerably.

There is another problem with how teachers see their schools. It might be that perception of disadvantage encourages a parallel perception of seriousness of the problem. It was noticeable that headteachers in what they themselves called 'more fortunate schools' would add to explain

their lack of problems 'but of course we are not an inner-city school'. The equation of 'disadvantaged' with 'problems' is perhaps common but may not be as straightforward as such assumptions imply. While not wishing to minimise problems faced by teachers in schools which are large, inner-city and serving catchment areas deprived in many ways, we feel that it is too simplistic to say that in all such cases the discipline situation is very serious.

We looked in detail at pupil behaviours reported by teachers, in relation to the 'disadvantage' of the school, as described by teachers. By pupil behaviours we mean those classroom/school behaviours reported by teachers as having happened in the past week (see Table 2.1). When we looked again at the things the pupils did, we found that the most common pupil behaviours, that is talking out-of-turn in class and showing a lack of concern for others in school, seemed to occur more often in larger schools and in inner-city schools. We also tried to discover whether there were more reports of extreme disruptive behaviours in these schools. The number of teachers reporting violence or aggression overall was not high. In order to maximise our chances of testing whether such behaviours were more likely in disadvantaged schools, we collapsed all the teacher mentions of the extreme kinds of bad behaviours into one category. This gave each school a global 'bad behaviour unit'. The new unit could be graded into bands, from low extreme to high extreme. Using this new unit, we found no distinctive pattern in the teachers' replies. Schools with a 'low extreme' score were not necessarily the more fortunate schools in terms of catchment; schools with a 'high extreme' score were not necessarily the more disadvantaged.

We could say then that pupils in larger, inner-city schools presented more of the everyday behaviours disruptive of classroom routine which teachers dealt with in all schools. We could speculate that in these schools pupils may have presented such behaviours in more extreme ways. This followed what teachers reported of difficult classes; these classes did the same kinds of things as ordinary classes, but more often and perhaps more threateningly.

## Headteachers' views

The headteachers gave a more optimistic view of the seriousness of the problem within their schools, just as they had given a more optimistic view of how easy it was to deal with indiscipline. The vast majority felt that the problem was not really very serious (86%, as compared with 64% of teachers). The remaining 14% took the opposite view, including 1% who saw things as very serious. Readers may recollect that 21% of the headteachers found some pupil behaviour difficult to deal with; for the classroom, 46% of the teachers gave this reply, and 36% for pupil behaviours around the school. It seemed that a similar gap existed between teachers and headteachers both on overall perception of the problem and on the difficulty of dealing with pupil behaviours.

We could speculate that headteachers may have been more concerned than teachers to give a good picture of their school. A degree of good

public relations was certainly one aspect of the headteacher's role. Equally, we might speculate that headteachers have the critical distance to give an honest overall view. For example, one headteacher wrote:

> The most difficult matter in relation to discipline is separating fact from fiction. Nearly all staff will assert that discipline is presently worse than some golden era in the past, when pupils obeyed without question and never challenged authority and when parents always supported the school. However, when pushed, it is difficult to get this established as a fact. The assertions are that pupils are generally more noisy, talkative, less motivated, but particular cases melt away when factual information is requested.

Not all headteachers felt this way, as the following example illustrates:

> The problem of discipline, together with that of the rate of curricular change, seem to me to be the major difficulties facing secondary education at present. It is difficult to overstate the fury felt by the average classroom teacher when 'experts' state publicly on television, as happened recently, that 'there is no discipline problem in Scottish schools'. If that is the case, why are there hundreds of suspended children walking the streets day after day?

On the whole, headteachers who felt that the problem was not serious well outnumbered those who thought it was. It may be that the more positive headteachers were reflecting the ability of their staff to cope rather than reflecting the problems teachers coped with. Of course, it is also possible, as some cynical teachers suggested, that some headteachers were turning a blind eye to the real situation and 'hiding in the office'.

Whatever the reasons, it does seem as if headteachers saw a more positive picture of the discipline situation than teachers did. Or did they? Headteachers were asked various questions about the school: two of these questions concerned the possibility of an increase in problems (both in sheer numbers and in gravity) and in pupil violence. Another question concerned changes in time spent on dealing with discipline problems.

First, the time question; almost half the headteachers felt that they were spending about the same time on discipline problems as they always had. One headteacher in four thought he was spending more time on such problems. This view could have reflected the increasingly time-consuming nature of dealing with problems rather than a direct increase in indiscipline, of course. Another one in four thought he was spending less time on discipline problems. This view could have reflected the benefits of a good referral chain rather than a decrease in indiscipline.

Asked directly about the increase or decrease in indiscipline during their time in post, the headteachers' replies gave us a broad picture of the schools. This showed that there were:

- over a quarter of schools where the situation was thought to be the same
- just under a quarter where problems had decreased
- just under a fifth where problems had increased

- just under a quarter of schools where headteachers gave an incomplete or confusing picture.

About 16% of the headteachers had been in post for a year or even less; this may account for some of the missing responses. Those headteachers who thought that problems were the same in number and in gravity formed the largest group. We do not know whether this static situation is good news or bad news, however. In those schools where problems had decreased in number, the headteachers either felt the gravity of problems had also decreased or had at least stayed the same. Similarly, those who thought that problems had increased in number either thought they had become more grave or had stayed the same. This rather complex picture seemed to us to lend a certain consistency to headteachers' claims that the problem was not really serious, by indicating that problems were either staying static or improving marginally.

On the other hand, when asked specifically about pupil violence, very few people failed to answer this question; 32% of the headteachers said that this had increased. This is a higher percentage than those who saw the situation in schools as serious. It is also a higher percentage than those who thought indiscipline problems were becoming worse. However, to put this into perspective, about two-thirds of those who felt that pupil violence had increased *also* felt that the discipline problem in their school was not very serious. This may seem illogical but we remind readers that most of the headteachers felt that it was a minority of about 5% of the pupils who consistently caused serious problems. Perhaps this minority of very difficult pupils had become more aggressive? In fact, pupil violence was defined by headteachers as aggressive or confrontational behaviour between pupils, plus some verbal abuse towards the teacher. Early questions had shown pupil-to-pupil violence to be reported fairly frequently by both teachers (Table 2.1) and headteachers (Table 2.2), but of course it could be the minority who consistently did this. Is this kind of pupil behaviour something which teachers must learn to accept as part of a changing society? Several headteachers mentioned teacher stress as a result of daily wear and tear. Even if teachers can cope, and even if it is a minority of pupils who are aggressively confrontational, where does one draw the line on what is acceptable behaviour?

## Some comparisons with England and Wales

Throughout this paper we have referred to the Elton Report and the survey of teachers in England and Wales carried out by Gray and Sime. In the main, the views of teachers in that survey agreed with the views expressed in our Scottish survey. The same kinds of pupil behaviours occurred in both sets of schools and classrooms, in about the same frequency overall, but apparently on a higher daily basis in Scottish schools. We have already noted that Scottish teachers seemed to encounter more 'cheeky or impertinent remarks', or perhaps be more ready to notice this kind of behaviour. Scottish teachers also seemed a little more likely to say that pupil behaviour was difficult to deal with. We would speculate here that Scottish teachers may have set themselves high targets, in

expecting to be able to deal with almost everything that occurred. This was a point made by several teachers, who felt that over the years they had been 'forced to raise their tolerance levels'. Some teachers wrote very positively of the increased friendliness between pupils and teachers, arising out of the abolition of corporal punishment and a situation where children were allowed to question information given to them. Other teachers appeared to regret a certain loss of overall control. These teachers may not have found teaching difficult but perhaps they found it difficult to deal as conclusively with pupil indiscipline as once they had done.

When it came to making a global judgement of the seriousness of the situation in their own schools, Scottish teachers took a more pessimistic view than Scottish headteachers, whose views were more similar to those of the teachers in England and Wales (headteachers in England and Wales were not surveyed). Table 7.2 shows the comparative opinions of the different groups.

***Table 7.2** How serious a problem is indiscipline in your school: comparisons of views*

| | Scottish teachers % | Scottish headteachers* % | Teachers in England and Wales % |
|---|---|---|---|
| no problem at all | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| minor | 16 | 28 | 26 |
| not very serious | 46 | 54 | 53 |
| serious | 31 | 13 | 15 |
| very serious | 5 | 1 | 1 |

*Headteachers in England and Wales did not participate in the survey

At first glance this table looks alarming but do we know what really counts as 'serious'? If we interpret this table in terms of the everyday problems reported by Scottish teachers, these problems are no different from the kinds of pupil behaviour reported by teachers in England and Wales. Superficially, the things pupils did seemed ordinary, irritating behaviour; over half the Scottish teachers found this quite easy to deal with. In the free response, where teachers elaborated on the kind of pupil indiscipline they met, it was generally in terms of a trivial but irritating or even stressful combination of incidents. Some 18% wrote about an increase in indiscipline, again in terms of a steady erosion of standards, or in general deterioration. There were few teachers who wrote in disturbing terms of what sounded like almost impossible situations, although there were some schools where the overall impression was a very unhappy one.

It is difficult to convey succinctly the cumulative effect of reading all the teachers' open responses but our impression overall was that Scottish teachers were worried about a situation in which pupil obedience could not be taken for granted. This was a view which surfaced again in the

headteachers' free response. People wrote about the reluctance or inability of some colleagues to accept that pupils could question what they said. People wrote about social change which was beyond teachers' control. Looking positively at Table 7.2, we might speculate that what Scottish teachers saw as serious was the frustration they met in trying to impose exacting standards of behaviour upon a different kind of pupil population. Looking negatively at Table 7.2, we might speculate that what Scottish teachers saw as serious was not the pupil misbehaviour but the slipping away of unquestioned teacher control.

We would not wish to underplay the very real problems faced by a minority of our respondents, nevertheless, we did question what people meant by 'serious'. One teacher's serious indiscipline may be another's trivial problem. What we have in Table 7.2 is the views of individuals. Did those individual teachers, when collected into their schools, agree or disagree on the seriousness of the situation? If they agreed, then this would lend weight to their judgement. If they disagreed, one might be inclined to suspect that individual situations and perceptions clouded the whole school picture.

## Are some schools worse off than others?

One of the steps taken by Gray and Sime was to create a 'seriousness' score for each school. This was done by aggregating all the teacher responses to that question, for each school, then dividing by the number of teachers responding for each school. The greatest drawback to this simple procedure is that the question itself measures opinion, not fact. The same category of reply, the choice of 'serious', for example, could describe quite different situations. As one of our teachers said:

> A bad day in our school would have been a very good day in the school I used to teach in.

There is also the problem of how many teachers in a school are needed to give a fair overall picture. Gray and Sime had a high return rate from a random sample of one teacher in four in each school in their sample. We too had a high return rate, but our teachers ranged from two to ten people from smaller to larger schools.

As a matter of interest, we followed Gray and Sime in creating school scores. We then used the technique of analysis of variance to help us decide where the main source of variation was found. The analysis of variance showed that there was a greater difference in responses *within* schools than *between* schools. In other words, there was a high proportion of schools where the teachers differed over the seriousness of the discipline problem. This seems quite logical, given the teachers' locations within different departments, their different personalities and the different specific contexts on which they could base their opinion. However, there was a convergence of teacher views at the extremes of the 'seriousness' scale. There were some schools where the teachers tended to agree that the situation was serious, and there were some schools where the teachers tended to agree that the situation was not at all serious. We were

interested in the background characteristics of these schools apparently seen as difficult or as comfortable by the teachers, but before looking at this we applied another test to the teachers' replies. Had teachers in these schools at the extremes of seriousness found pupil behaviours difficult to deal with?

As a first step we identified all those schools where a majority of teachers found the pupil behaviours they had reported difficult to deal with. We thought it was unlikely that all teachers in a school would report this, whatever the school was like. We therefore set a figure of six or more teachers in any given school reporting difficulty as characterising a 'difficult' school. This, of course, automatically cut out smaller schools with fewer teachers from inclusion as 'difficult'. However, we checked over the replies of all teachers in the schools with six or fewer signed replies, and found none which were convincingly negative. There were 22 schools where six or more of the teachers reported finding pupil behaviours difficult to deal with. In each of these schools, the school 'seriousness' score was also a high one. In other words, there were 22 schools at the 'difficult' end of the spectrum, where teachers tended to agree that indiscipline was a serious problem *and* tended to agree that pupil behaviour was difficult to deal with.

We then tried to identify schools where teachers found pupil behaviours easy to deal with. We suspected that more of the smaller schools would be found in this category, given suggestions in the free response section from both headteachers and teachers that smaller schools were happier schools (see Chapter 8). Accordingly, we set a very stringent criterion for inclusion in the 'comfortable' group. Every teacher in the school had to agree that pupil behaviours were easy to deal with. There were 19 of these schools, not all of them small schools. In each of these schools, the school 'seriousness' score was a very low one. In other words, there were 19 schools at the 'comfortable' end of the spectrum, where teachers agreed that indiscipline was not a problem *and* agreed that pupil behaviour was easy to deal with.

(Readers may recollect that there was a percentage of responses which were anonymous. If any of these were negative, and from any of the 19 'comfortable' schools, this would have reduced the total of 'comfortable' schools. If any of those were negative, and from school(s) which fell just short of inclusion in the 22 'difficult' schools, this would have increased the total of 'difficult' schools. We had no way to check this.)

Generally speaking, as we noted earlier, individual teachers who saw discipline problems as more serious were likely to see their schools as disadvantaged in several ways. In the 22 schools where teachers agreed that pupil behaviour was difficult and that the problem was serious, teachers tended to describe their schools as disadvantaged in terms of the prosperity of the catchment area, the general ability level of the pupils and the relatively urban or inner-city location of the schools. In the 19 schools where teachers agreed that pupil behaviour was not difficult to deal with and where the problem was not serious, teachers tended to describe their

schools as average to disadvantaged in terms of the prosperity of the catchment area, as average or above average in terms of general ability level of pupils and as small town or rural in location. This broad picture is based on how the teachers themselves described their schools.

We also had information about the roll of each school. In our total sample, there were 23 schools with 400 or fewer pupils. Eight of these schools were in the 'comfortable' group of 19 schools, but none in the 'difficult' group of 22. Similarly, in the total sample there were 13 schools with 1201 pupils and more. Four of these schools were in the 'difficult' group of 22 — and two in the 'comfortable' group of 19.

Before we leave these two groups of schools, what did their headteachers think of the situation? Three of the schools were 'lost', in that we had no reply from the headteacher, but the remaining 38 headteachers gave their opinions. Headteachers in both kinds of school seemed to have a tendency to a cautious optimism and reply that the situation was not very serious. However, there were some divergences from the teachers' views. Three of the headteachers in schools where teachers felt that discipline was good and that pupil behaviours were not difficult to deal with, thought the problem was serious. Equally, six headteachers in schools seen as more difficult by the teachers felt that discipline problems were minor. The numbers are too few to make a major point of any differences but the divergences of view are interesting.

## The general picture: possible explanations

The analysis of variance suggested more differences within the schools than between them. There were 41 schools where colleagues tended to agree: in 22 schools they agreed that the situation was serious, in 19 schools they agreed that the situation was good. There were 71 schools where colleagues apparently held different, even diametrically opposed views of how serious the situation was. As individuals, 36% of Scottish teachers saw the discipline situation as serious. At least some of these people were teaching side by side with a colleague who took a quite different view.

Clearly, what one makes of these findings depends on value judgements. It is probably impossible to agree an acceptable level of schools and teachers reporting discipline as a serious problem. In our opinion, there is some cause for concern that 20% of schools in our sample were perceived almost unanimously by teachers responding as having serious discipline problems and that 36% of teachers overall saw discipline as a serious problem. There are two possible explanations for the negative views expressed by the teachers, explanations which lie in the questionnaire itself. Firstly, it was a questionnaire about *indiscipline*. As such, the questions emphasised problems, difficulties — all the things that might go wrong in a school. It is possible that this in itself encouraged a more negative response and gave teachers the chance to air their complaints rather than their positive thoughts. The timing of the questionnaire may also have contributed. The questionnaire was sent out towards the end of

a school term, when people may have been feeling jaded or even stressed. This too may have encouraged pessimistic replies.

Perhaps the last point to make is that in 71 schools, staff's view of overall discipline varied quite considerably. We have no way of knowing whether this was because they had different standards, had views coloured by the classes they taught or for other reasons. We suspect that variation in view is an indication of the context-specific nature of discipline and that 'reality' is hard to pin down.

## Key findings

- **Some 36% of teachers overall saw discipline as a serious or very serious problem.**
- **In 22 of 112 schools (20%) teachers tended to agree that discipline was a serious problem and that pupil behaviour was difficult to deal with.**
- **Some 64% of teachers overall did not see discipline as a serious problem.**
- **In 19 of 112 schools (17%) teachers tended to agree that discipline was not a serious problem and that pupil behaviour was not difficult to deal with.**
- **Some 86% of headteachers overall did not see discipline as a serious problem.**
- **Headteachers in the 'difficult' and in the 'comfortable' schools tended to be more neutral than the teachers.**

# 8 General views on discipline

## Introduction

The last page of both questionnaires asked 'Is there anything more you can tell us about your views or experiences in relation to discipline?' — this open invitation produced replies from 69% of the teachers and 58% of the headteachers. As the headteachers had been given a broader questionnaire with more open-ended questions, the rather lower response rate was not surprising.

The questions asked in the main body of the questionnaires had attempted to focus replies on specific issues, and had therefore constrained the respondents by offering a limited fixed choice of reply. The open response section allowed teachers and headteachers total freedom to express their views. Very few of these free responses were brief. Most ran to a page (or more) of handwriting, with a few people sending in two or three typewritten pages. The sheer quantity of response was almost overwhelming. As might have been expected, the teachers and headteachers gave multiple and personal responses. The mixture of facts, theories, perceptions and beliefs was difficult to code (see the Technical Appendix), but overall these free responses gave a very direct impression of how those teachers and headteachers saw discipline in their schools.

Throughout this chapter, as we discuss the views expressed in the free response, we quote percentages. Please note that 'percentage' in both cases means the percentage of the teachers (609) or of the headteachers (224) who wrote an open response. We have no way of knowing the views of the 174 teachers or of the 162 headteachers who did not give any response in this part of the questionnaire.

## Recipes for good discipline

The largest category of reply, from both teachers and headteachers, consisted of recipes for dealing with indiscipline. These shaded over into beliefs about teaching, theories of management, beliefs about human nature and children specifically, stories about past success or failure and speculations and hopes. The kinds of recipes offered (by 43% of the teachers and 63% of the headteachers) were ideas to be found in texts on teaching and on classroom or school management. Although it was not usually clear whether or not such steps were taken in the respondent's own classroom or school, it was clear that positive practical ideas about creating good discipline were common currency. To give a flavour of the kind of ideas suggested, we offer two lengthy quotations:

> Most discipline problems result from 'petty' situations leading to confrontation. Authority is often perceived as being 'inflexible' and as a result problems accrue where a little 'humanity' would defuse.

Injustice and no forgiveness for past errors are seen by pupils as unfair (and these are fair comments) A teacher can be (and should be) strict and fair and pupils will respect that. Pupils need firm and clear rules which they can see the reasons for and fairness of - they object to rules that change. Teachers also need to recognise that 'lines' or an essay to a pupil of poor ability is tantamount to a life sentence! and will lead to problems. Discipline should be a joint (pupil and staff) policy NOT an imposed one - as pupils resent rules that have no apparent purpose. A reasoned discussion on rules lead to an acceptance of discipline and often pupils present the same rules as a teacher!

(Teacher)

I found the tone of the questionnaire rather negative. There seems to be a reluctance to look at the positive aspects of school which lead in my view to a reduction in discipline problems. A brief summary of the major elements in any school's approach to discipline in my view would be:

1 The overall atmosphere and ethos of the school. A friendly 'family' approach to young people reduces a great deal of potential aggravation between staff and students.

2 A meaningful and relevant curriculum. I am still of the opinion that too many of the young people in Scottish schools are forced to go through a curriculum which does not answer their needs and therefore becomes a vehicle which generates indiscipline rather than reduces the problem.

3 Reduction of pressure on staff. The present turmoil in education over the many ill thought out changes has produced a great deal of stress in the staff. One of the outcomes of the stress is often intolerance with young people.

4 Time to deal with discipline in a society which has quite rightly eradicated corporal punishment. Without time no meaningful discussions or dialogue between staff and students can take place. In my view, this is the way forward and society has to pay the bill to give staff time to work with children in very small numbers.

The staffing standards in most schools do not give anywhere near the requirements for this development.

5 A pleasant, well kept and cared for environment. Most of the schools in the country are appallingly run down and it is not surprising that this kind of atmosphere generates in the young people a disregard for property. This therefore leads to certain aspects of indiscipline. Again society needs to pay for the schools to be brought up to standard, a standard which many adults, if they were asked to work in, would consider inappropriate.

(Headteacher)

## Improvement or deterioration?

The teachers and headteachers had ideas about how to deal with indiscipline and how to promote good discipline, but within each sample there was disagreement about whether the position had changed for better or worse — or stayed the same. Interestingly enough, fewer people wrote about this than wrote about other aspects of school life contributing

to good discipline. Given that a relatively high percentage of individual teachers (36%) had judged the position in their school as serious, we might have anticipated further illustration of this in the free response section. In fact, the views that indiscipline had increased was expressed by 18% of teachers and 2% of headteachers. Some quotes on this are:

> There has been a steady erosion of discipline over the past ten years.
>
> I have taught for 16 years in 5 different schools and have witnessed a total erosion in discipline standards.
>
> In my fifteen years of teaching, I have noticed a gradual deterioration in the behaviour of pupils of all ages.
>
> 18% of teachers
>
> I believe there has been a deterioration in standards in discipline over the twelve years I have been a HT ...
>
> 2% of headteachers

The opposite view, that discipline had improved, was not expressed as firmly or clearly. The tendency was for teachers to describe discipline as good, or as the same (but not worse) or as subtly different in terms of pupil behaviour (but not worse). Headteachers tended to describe discipline as having improved. Some quotes illustrating these views are:

> In my school, discipline is not a problem - classes/individuals do not provoke the visceral contractions of other schools.
>
> The atmosphere in the school is good, and we are reasonably proud of our discipline record.
>
> 9% of teachers
>
> I believe that, in general, pupil behaviour is not a major problem and that, in fact, it is much better than it was in my school days.
>
> In this school in 1985 the level of indiscipline was appalling. For five years we have given a high priority to changing this situation and have achieved a normal, relatively well behaved social situation in the school.
>
> 12% of headteachers

Although the percentages of people expressing a view on the improvement or the deterioration of discipline were small (and we remind readers that 31% of the full teacher sample and 42% of the headteacher sample gave no free response), it was evident that teachers were more pessimistic about discipline than headteachers.

## Definitions of indiscipline

One problem raised by several teachers and headteachers was that discipline could be defined differently, and that these different definitions could lead different people to see the same pupil behaviour as illustrating acceptable discipline standards or as illustrating a decline in standards. Awareness

of this led to descriptions of indiscipline being given. Definitions of good behaviour or of good discipline seemed to be taken for granted or perhaps it was viewed as the avoidance of indiscipline:

> [Indiscipline] is like an intermittent annoying 'sore' which you can cope with but it would be preferable if it wasn't there at all.
>
> In most instances ...[it's]... the niggles, the consistent and constant chopping away at the system and the teacher...
>
> 12% of teachers

> Most indiscipline is like a dripping tap - not serious in itself but continually on-going, and therefore can be time consuming and frustrating.
>
> Although, paradoxically we have fewer major problems of indiscipline ... more and more youngsters are inclined to challenge the teacher's right to say or do things which would never previously have been questioned. Often this is not intended as a challenge but when a 12 year old asks why he or she should move his seat; pick up a piece of litter; stop talking when X was also talking; etc, etc, the teacher is faced with a more challenging situation than before, albeit at a much lower level of intent. This is not easy to deal with and the inexperienced or unwary can find this developing into something more serious.
>
> 13% of headteachers

Many of those who wrote describing everyday, 'ordinary' indiscipline also emphasised the stressful effects of constant repetition of apparently low level incidents. Violent incidents of indiscipline were rarely described. A very small percentage of teachers (1%) and of heads (2%) wrote about some incident involving physical violence. A further 1% of headteachers (in real number terms, 2 people) wrote about bullying.

There was another element to indiscipline which was noted by both groups, which was 'It's a minority who cause the problems'. This has already been referred to in Chapter 5. Headteachers were asked a direct question about this; therefore, perhaps, fewer headteachers than teachers gave this view in the free response:

> There is a small group of pupils known to all staff, who are badly behaved and have a pernicious effect...
>
> Naturally we have problematic pupils, but thankfully they are in the minority.
>
> A significant minority of our pupils are consistently badly behaved, not only towards teachers but also towards each other ...
>
> 17% of teachers

> Like all schools we have a minority of pupils who create problems for a variety of reasons.
>
> ...the majority of youngsters behave in a responsible manner most of the time and the pupils who cause serious problems are very much in the minority.

> To keep matters in perspective it must be said that the vast majority of children are pleasant, obedient and friendly. Those who are not, however, respond much less well to any kind of discipline than in past years.
>
> 9% of headteachers

In common-sense terms, this seems an eminently reasonable view, but what is a minority? At what stage does a minority become too large to cope with comfortably? We cannot answer these questions, indeed answers may vary from teacher to teacher, as do definitions of discipline.

## Dealing with indiscipline

Generalities and ideas relevant to dealing with indiscipline were placed in the category labelled recipes, especially as it was not always clear whether the idea presented was something which the respondent actually did. However, there was a very clear category of complaint in the free response section, in relation to dealing with indiscipline. Some typical views were:

> The formal process [of dealing with a difficult pupil] is extremely tortuous ... it can take years to get rid of a difficult pupil.
>
> Discipline and punishments are too longwinded and so full of paperwork that they become ineffective.
>
> Even detentions are normal routine for the most difficult pupils.
>
> 30% of teachers

> The treadmill of suspension leading to exclusion leading to possible transfer gets staff down and the whole process is too slow and not immediate enough to be used as a deterrent.
>
> A few difficult pupils take an inordinate amount of time.
>
> It is not unknown for a pupil to fail to do punishment exercises, to be missing from detention and not to bother to get their behaviour card signed.
>
> 15% of headteachers

Very few teachers called for the return of corporal punishment, but the sanctions available to teachers were not viewed favourably. This accords with replies to direct questions in the main body of the questionnaire (See Table 4.3, Chapter 4). However, replies here were more complex than might initially appear. Teachers and headteachers were not just grumbling, they also wrote about the effects on 'the well-intentioned majority' of pupils when inordinate time was spent on the difficult minority. There was also the effect on the majority when sanctions were seen to be ineffectual. In addition, both teachers and headteachers wrote of the debilitating effect of following through sanctions against petty offences, and differences in teacher willingness to follow through. In other words, the lack of an immediate sanction affected not just the specific incident, but had an invidious ripple effect throughout the school.

One way of dealing with indiscipline is of course to prevent it from happening. Again, there were many recipes given here (eg 'be prepared for each lesson'). More specifically, changes in the curriculum and in methodology were cited as improving discipline by a small percentage of teachers. A larger percentage saw these changes as more problematic. Headteachers were divided on this, but where they saw change as leading to indiscipline this was generally seen as an indirect effect of a worthwhile step. Only small percentages of people wrote about this, but it was a distinct category of strong opinions, as the quotes illustrate:

> Within the department the courses offered to pupils have been constantly adapted and this has meant that the discipline problems are negligible.
>
> 4% of teachers

> Resource collecting and information research in the library is a perfect 'skive' for my SG pupils, and the loony that thought 'open-plan' departments would be conducive to good discipline and control should teach in my area for two months!!!
>
> 13% of teachers

> With this [the curriculum] now changing, discipline problems in S3 and S4 and with winter leavers have disappeared to a very large extent.
>
> 5% of headteachers

> There are so many demands on teachers during this period of educational upheaval that they do not have the time to devote to resolving discipline problems. Talking pupils through the situation and negotiating with them takes time. The sarcastic rebuke/issue of a severe punishment exercise is the apparent quick solution to a problem when in fact it encourages and contributes to an on-going and growing problem.
>
> 4% of headteachers

One further factor in dealing with indiscipline is that pupil numbers matter. Where this was given as a generality, it was put into the recipes category. Where the teacher or headteacher clearly and unequivocally wrote about the reality in his or her school, the reply was kept separate. All of these comments spoke positively of small classes or of small schools, as the quotes show:

> What has immeasurably improved discipline [in my school] is the reduction in class size due to the falling roll ... This is good for both pupils and staff, less strain, less tension and a satisfactory lessening of discipline problems.
>
> 14% of teachers

> It is my view that our small size facilitates good relationships within the school and is of great value in maintaining a healthy ethos.
>
> 12% of headteachers

## The discipline context

Dealing with indiscipline and promoting good discipline is affected by how the school works, as many of our respondents noted. There were factors about individual schools which staff felt helped or hindered the realisation of good discipline. The kind of positive factors we noted are illustrated in the following quotes:

> There is a firm and clear policy on discipline.
>
> We have a very good guidance system.
>
> Pupils are always given reasons for the rules.
>
> 8% of teachers

> The discipline system in this school is one created and monitored by a committee of teachers and it is highly successful in that the teachers themselves feel they own it and it is suited to the types of pupil who are the bulk of the school roll.
>
> The school has an effective tutorial/guidance/social education structure and this has reduced the number of severe discipline problems.
>
> [We have a] high profile of senior management in the school, especially in direct supervision of pupils during non-teaching time, eg intervals, lunchtime.
>
> This [good discipline] is due to the professionalism and awareness of the vast majority of the teachers.
>
> 19% of headteachers

Headteachers wrote more in both quantity and variety of content than did teachers on this topic. We made every effort to ensure that we included in this positive category only those headteachers and teachers who were writing about their own school. People who wrote in such terms as 'The best way to ensure good discipline is...' or 'Good discipline comes from ...', although they may have mentioned positive factors, were coded into the recipes category. This decision on our part may have reduced the percentages of people who were really giving information about their schools but it allowed us to avoid falsely high percentages reached by including what could have been recipe advice.

The relative proportions of teachers and headteachers commenting on positive factors were reversed when it came to negative comment, although we should point out that critical remarks are usually specific, and therefore easier to interpret as relevant to the school rather than to schools in general. Negative comments about the school discipline context referred to the attitudes and behaviour of staff, teachers and management:

> Whole school discipline needs a consistent approach. Too often teachers (including myself) either turn a blind eye to an incident or deal with it in a perfunctory manner. 'Not enought time/too much to do' may seem a lame excuse, but it's true.
>
> ...a clear policy for discipline and good feedback from the Board of

> Studies [are] the most common factors identified as being missing from this school by my colleagues here and their lack is perceived as being the cause of our discipline problems.
>
> 26% of teachers

> There can be a significant problem with 'authoritarian' teachers. Their word has to be law, their instructions obeyed. The style does not accord with Scotland in 1990 ... In my school this group perceives discipline as a problem and in their own terms they are right. Their approach is often the problem in itself.

> A proportion of staff deal with discipline only within their classroom: in corridors and the playground some turn a blind eye.
>
> 12% of headteachers

This was an area where teachers expressed doubts about management and management expressed doubts about teachers, by and large. We should add that of the 27 headteachers (12%) in this group, many were at pains to point out that they spoke only of a minority of their staff. On the whole, teachers were more critical of how schools were run, although as we reported in Chapter 6 most headteachers felt that they tried to listen to their staff and to boost staff morale. We might add that few teachers wrote about the management of their department, but those who did all wrote positively. It was also the case that those who were critical of management offered ideas to improve the situation, such as 'being seen around the school'.

## The broader context of the school

If teacher and headteacher comment is added together, the largest single category of response dealt with the broader social context of the school. For both teachers and headteachers, this was a negative category. Social change and the role of the school were seen as out of step. Pupil attitudes were changing for the worse. Home and family were seen as either of little help or as offering standards different from the school definitions of good behaviour. Presumably not all teachers and headteachers agreed with these negative views, but very few people wrote positively about parental and home influence. The quotations given here are typical of the negative comment:

> Pupils' attitudes to work and common politeness in a group situation are decidedly unhealthy in this school.

> Parental support is on the decrease—[A parent will say] 'I can't do anything with him either'!!!

> At home, children expect to come first in the life of the family and in school many of them behave in a selfish, uncaring way, with no idea of consideration of others...
>
> 30% of teachers

> Home and family circumstances influence the pupils and create tensions which assert themselves as problems in the classroom of a

time-wasting nature or as feuding between pupils, particularly girls, in the school grounds or outwith the school.

They [pupils] are simply badly behaved - [this is] behaviour which appears to be acceptable in their home environment.

There are clear cases where the fragmentation of the home background and support has created problems for pupils in coping with school rules.

18% of headteachers

Headteachers also made the point that national or regional policies inhibit action and that the school has to operate within this context too. Again, these comments were largely negative, as the following selection shows:

The Education Department has virtually divorced itself from school discipline in any effective way. A bland policy document exists.

Many of our problems are caused by pupils sent to us by the LEA after causing trouble in other schools. This is the policy of the LEA and it is creating considerable discontent among the staff.

The surprising thing is that many teachers/schools cope so well; certainly the education authority and society in general do nothing to help us resolve this problem.

12% of headteachers

A very small percentage of teachers (1%) wrote in similar terms. There was also a very small percentage of headteachers (2%) who wrote positively about the regional authority's policies in respect of discipline.

## Key findings

**These findings are based on responses of 609 teachers and 224 headteachers who answered the question 'Is there anything more you can tell us about your views or experiences in relation to discipline?'**

- **Teachers and headteachers offered a wide range of ideas to improve discipline in the classroom and the school, including the need for the firm and fair application of rules, involving staff and pupils in devising rules and the importance of a friendly approach to pupils.**
- **Teachers and headteachers were highly concerned about the effects of social change on the school and on discipline. They saw home and school values as often out of step and deplored the selfish, uncaring, attitude of some of their pupils — usually seen as a minority.**
- **Teachers and, to a lesser extent, headteachers noted the lack of immediate and/or effective sanctions, but did not suggest a return to corporal punishment.**

- **Good management, eg a visible headteacher, and good communication systems, were seen as important to promoting good discipline.**
- **Good discipline was easier to promote in smaller schools.**
- **There was no agreement as to whether discipline was improving or deteriorating; teachers were more pessimistic than headteachers.**
- **Indiscipline was described as low-level but repetitive and stressful; a minority of pupils were seen as causing problems.**

# 9 Conclusion

## Introduction

This report has presented the views of headteachers and of a sample of teachers on the problems of discipline in Scottish secondary schools. These views were obtained through postal questionnaires focused firmly on indiscipline. We attempted to root replies in the reality of the respondents' own schools by asking them to consider indiscipline in 'the past week'. The replies were nevertheless the personal perceptions of the teachers and headteachers on the events of that past week. On a key question such as the seriousness of the problem in the respondent's own school, for example, there was a high level of disagreement and of contradictory views expressed by people teaching in the same school.

This makes any summative conclusion difficult to achieve. What we offer is a general picture of indiscipline in Scottish schools as it appears to staff in these schools. We feel this will be of great interest to other teachers, as a means of evaluating their own views and of defining how their school approaches the question of good discipline. Headteachers will find their collective views in this report, but in addition they will find various teacher perspectives and comments on management. This report cannot give the definitive position on discipline in secondary schools, but it gives an outline of how people feel, what they do — and what they see as good and bad about their schools.

## Defining indiscipline

The trouble with indiscipline is that everyone may know what they mean when they talk about it, but individual meanings can differ. It is not news that indiscipline is defined in different ways by different people. The approach taken in the questionnaires was to provide teachers and headteachers with lists of pupil behaviours identified in earlier researches as disruptive to classroom routines or to effective teaching and learning.

Teachers agreed that these were behaviours they encountered from their pupils, and that they were behaviours which could cause problems. Their replies to the questionnaire gave us information about the prevalence of these potentially problematic behaviours. It also gave us information about whether the pupil behaviours were difficult to deal with or not, and about which were the most difficult. It did not give us information about the quality or the context of pupil bad behaviour. For example, 'talking out of turn' seemed to be a persistent problem which was difficult to deal with. It seemed to us that there could be degrees of 'talking out of turn', but that it was the persistence and recurrence of this behaviour which made it difficult to deal with.

The replies in the free response section helped here, by identifying two main reasons for the difficulty in dealing with what might seem very ordinary childish behaviour. One was, as we suggested, the difficulty of getting some behaviours to stop, other than in the short term. These behaviours were difficult to deal with because no matter what was done, they could never be wiped out. The other reason was that actually dealing with the problem behaviour could make as large a disruption to the lesson as the behaviour itself. Those teachers who occasionally chose to ignore minor disruptions had presumably weighed up the cost of acting (and creating a bigger break in the lesson) and the cost of letting the incident go. It seems to us that to make such a decision accurately calls for a great deal of skill. Such a strategy also seems to hold a potential for staff disagreement, especially if the skill and experience of the teachers who turn a blind eye can be called into question by colleagues.

One change often viewed as beneficial to discipline is the development of an 'appropriate' curriculum. Headteachers saw curricular development as an important priority for their schools, but curricular change was seen as less central to tackling indiscipline than several other approaches, eg smaller classes or more counselling for pupils. These particular ideas may have been seen as a way of dealing with perceived changes in the social context of the school. The society in which the school operates must colour definitions of discipline and indiscipline. Teachers (and headteachers) wrote about a changing society and changing manners, and offered two opposing views. The positive and minority response focused on improved personal relationships with pupils, which we might suggest could encourage a less adversarial definition of pupil behaviours as 'indiscipline'. The negative and majority response saw schools struggling with more pupils who were behaving badly and impeding the work of the school.

There is a further point we would like to make. Giving pupil behaviours the definition of *indiscipline* may imply that the school is always right and the pupils wilfully rebellious. The solution to indiscipline would then lie in changing the pupils. Better discipline might be achieved by tighter control of the pupils or by persuading the pupils to accept the school ethos. We do not wish to suggest that schools are always wrong, but it is noteworthy that changes within the school were not often given as important strategies in dealing more effectively with pupil behaviours. There is now substantial literature indicating that schools do make a difference. Schools with similar pupils can differ markedly in their effectiveness. Improving discipline involves schools being ready to investigate their own practice, the habits and routines which may contribute to discipline problems.

## Dealing with indiscipline and promoting good discipline

In dealing with pupil behaviours, teachers tried strategies such as humour, or they tried sanctions such as punishment exercises. Some of these responses they had faith in, others were seen as ineffective as often as not. We assumed that teachers who used a particular action yet who found it

ineffective were saying that this response worked sometimes, or that this response was only effective in the short term, or that this response was punitive rather than curative. In any case teachers had no guarantee of success in eradicating the behaviour.

We did not ask directly about preventative strategies, but the teachers wrote about these at some length in the free response section. It is difficult to convey what they said without sounding platitudinous. The teachers wrote about being well-prepared, arriving at the classroom before the pupils, getting to know the pupils and establishing relationships, organising the classroom, anticipating problems and making lessons interesting. None of the things they did were new, or unexpected. All of the things they wrote about were inextricably bound up with ideas of effective teaching. While good classroom discipline may not guarantee effective teaching and learning, it seems likely that poor classroom discipline will surely inhibit it.

What was not clear from the teachers' comments on effective preventative strategies was whether this was the ideal to which a good teacher should aspire, or everyday reality. If it were reality, how they did these things and how they reacted to changing contexts could not be conveyed in response to a questionnaire. The positive school ethos which interacts with effective classroom strategies is described in our case-studies.

Headteachers saw building up teacher morale as an important part of promoting good discipline. They also focused on developing the curriculum, encouraging staff development and providing good social education for all pupils. The actions they saw as promoting good discipline were elements of what might create a positive ethos in the school. However, as more than one headteacher noted, creating a positive ethos is easier to say than to do. Headteachers were unanimous in seeing themselves as working at ways of supporting teachers, supporting pupils and improving life in school generally; teachers were more critical. For some teachers, leadership or positive policies from senior management did not exist.

There are several possible explanations for this. Negative explanations are that, in some schools, a positive ethos was only a slogan or that, in some schools, teachers were confirmed cynics who interpreted management attempts to build such an ethos as as empty rhetoric. A less negative explanation may lie in confusion as to what this ethos might be and what can be done to promote it. The visibility of senior staff and the willingness of senior staff to explain and to communicate were seen by teachers as essential to good discipline in the school and to the success of a positive school ethos. For various reasons, not least of which was the day-to-day attrition of routine administration, headteachers spent less of their time on strategies seen by them as most important to the promotion of good discipline.

## How serious is the problem?

We have gone into the question of 'serious' versus 'difficult to deal with'

at some length in Chapter 7. We can only add to this that defining indiscipline may define not only how it is to be dealt with, but how 'serious' it appears to be. In 20% of the schools sampled, teachers saw the indiscipline problem as both serious and difficult to deal with. In 17% of the schools sampled, teachers saw the indiscipline problem as neither serious nor difficult to deal with. In the remaining 63% of schools, teachers gave different and opposing views of the situation in their school as they saw it.

To compound the difficulty of assessing the seriousness of the problem, it was evident from the free response section and from the main questionnaire that both teachers and headteachers saw the majority of their pupils as well-behaved. Teachers and headteachers also wrote about the difficulty of dealing effectively and immediately with indiscipline. We might speculate that those who saw the problem as serious were speaking in relation to a minority of pupils or to the difficulty of dealing with problems rather than an alarming spread of indiscipline. Alternatively, we might suggest that those who saw the problem as serious had in mind the cumulative, stressful effect of low-level continual niggles rather than a dramatic increase in serious discipline problems. These are only speculations, however. It is impossible to say whether this overall picture means things are better, or worse, or the same as they ever were in Scottish schools.

## Conclusion

Teachers and headteachers felt sufficiently interested in the question of discipline to send us a high rate of returned questionnaires which included an enormous amount of extra material. These returns represented a great deal of time given by people whose time was fully occupied. The centrality and importance of the issue in schools and classrooms was confirmed, as was the readiness of those involved to consider and to propose solutions. The free response particularly was indicative of the thought given to promoting good discipline. Teachers and headteachers had their own ideas. It seemed to us that they were not looking for instant solutions, but were asking that attention be paid to the issue.

There were schools in the sample where teachers and headteachers agreed that discipline was good. From the free response replies, it was clear that good discipline and a happy school did not happen automatically, even in the smallest schools. Teachers and headteachers praised the concerted efforts of all staff in the school in working towards this goal. It is difficult to convey the cumulative impact of reading 833 viewpoints as expressed in the free response sections completed by teachers and headteachers, but these responses gave colour and a qualitative depth to quantitative research.

At the most basic level, two opposing views emerged. One was that school and society were out of step, and that discipline would be improved if society could be changed, if parents would recognise and support the efforts made by the school. Whether this view is seen as nostalgic or

unrealistic or as a reflection of honest effort rejected, it is based on the assumption that the school defines acceptable standards of behaviour or discipline. It seems to us that an enormous effort of will would be needed to impose such a definition on a non-consenting population. The other view emerging was that negotiation over discipline was possible. Whether this view is seen as a disguise for falling standards of discipline or as an attempt to move with society, it is based on the assumption that the school cannot exclusively define acceptable standards of behaviour. However, this apparently more flexible view also demands work and the will to promote good discipline in order to succeed.

The survey indicated that there were no easy solutions, which is scarcely surprising. It also indicated that there were many schools which were trying hard, if not always succeeding, and that there was a pool of knowledge and skill to draw upon in aiming for the goal of good discipline.

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# Technical Appendix

## Introduction

The research looked at two different groups of people, teachers and headteachers in Scottish secondary schools in the state sector. In selecting a teacher sample we had two choices. We could draw up a framework of the population of Scottish secondary school teachers and try to find a sample which represented that general population. In itself this might be quite a difficult task. It might also mean that different kinds of school could be over- or under-represented. The alternative was to draw up a framework of Scottish schools on broad lines, then to choose teachers at random within these schools. The danger of this approach was that by chance a particular type of teacher could be under- or over-represented. As our interests lay in schools, we decided to take the second course. The headteacher sample was more straightforward. The headteacher sample was the total population of Scottish headteachers, including of course headteachers of those schools already chosen for the teacher sample. Our two samples are therefore of different values.

The teachers completed a questionnaire which differed only in minor points from the questionnaire developed by Gray and Sime for the Elton Committee. There was no separate headteacher group in their research. Our headteacher questionnaire is a version of the teacher questionnaire further developed from our case-study work and refined after piloting with a small group of headteachers and also after the comment made in the teachers' returns. As with any questionnaire, people can only reply to what has been asked. It is important therefore to ask what seem to be pertinent questions and to offer an appropriate and varied choice of response. It is also important to leave open questions and spaces for the respondents' own comments, just in case the questions have less pertinence than first appeared. Judging by the respondents' replies, the teacher questionnaire fairly successfully covered the topic of indiscipline. The headteachers perhaps felt a little more constrained by the questionnaire format, although they did make use of the 'open' spaces available to them.

## The schools

Our sample of one in four of Scottish schools was drawn up for us by the SOED Statistics Division. We asked them to create a sample which replicated the general picture in Scotland on three major points:

- size of school
- percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals
- ratio of denominational to non-denominational schools.

This framework gave us 114 schools which were a microcosm of Scottish schools in general. Within those schools the SOED selected from two to ten teachers at random. Before going on to discuss the teachers, we present a picture of the schools themselves in Tables A1 to A6. Table 1 sets out the overall framework of the survey, the 114 schools as identified by the SOED Statistics Division. Tables 2 to 6 inclusive are drawn from the descriptive information teachers supplied. While it is possible that this may not be entirely objective, we did find that within the schools teachers tended to agree in their descriptions. Readers will note that for Tables 2 to 6 the total number of schools has dropped to 112. This was the number of schools in the sample, as opposed to the 114 approached.

***Table A1** Number of schools selected for survey on discipline (1989 School Census Data)*

| Free Meal Entitlement % | School-Roll Band Widths <200 | 201-400 | 401-800 | 801-1201 | 1201> | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *RC Schools N = 19* | | | | | | |
| 0-10 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| 11-20 | 1 | - | 4 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| 21-30 | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | - | 5 |
| 31-40 | - | - | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| 41-50 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| 51-60 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| 61-70 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 71-80 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 81-90 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 91+ | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Non-denominational Schools N = 95* | | | | | | |
| 0-10 | 7 | 4 | 14 | 16 | 7 | 48 |
| 11-20 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 10 | 4 | 28 |
| 21-30 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| 31-40 | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | - | 4 |
| 41-50 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| 51-60 | - | - | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| 61-70 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| 71-80 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 81-90 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 91+ | - | - | | - | - | - |

As a footnote to Table 1, we might note that the school-roll band widths had suffered a degree of slippage by the date of the survey, in March 1990. The slippage was all in the same direction, therefore the relationship between smaller and larger schools stayed the same.

All of the factors tabulated in Tables A2 and A6 are factors which have been seen as having some association with questions of discipline. For example, boys are perceived as more likely to be troublesome or deviant than girls (see Docking, 1987), although this is contested by some researchers (see Watkins and Wagner, 1987 pp11-28). These background factors were reported similarly by all the teachers in any given school but even so they may require to be treated with caution. For example, a 'small town' could be descriptive of a genteel seaside resort or a depressed centre serving a now decaying industry.

***Table A2** Proportion of boys and girls*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| All boys | 1 | 1 |
| Mainly boys | 2 | 2 |
| Mixed 50/50 | 107 | 95 |
| Mainly girls | 1 | 1 |
| All girls | 1 | 1 |

***Table A3** School geographic catchment*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Rural | 7 | 6 |
| Rural/urban mix | 14 | 12 |
| small town | 52 | 47 |
| Suburban | 18 | 16 |
| Mixed suburban/inner city | 5 | 5 |
| Inner city | 16 | 14 |

*Table A4 Socio-economic catchment*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Prosperous area | 6 | 5 |
| Prosperous/average mix | 9 | 8 |
| Average, neither prosperous nor disadvantaged | 64 | 57 |
| Average/disadvantaged mix | 14 | 13 |
| Disadvantaged area | 19 | 17 |

*Table A5 Ability level of the pupils*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Above average | 2 | 2 |
| Above average/average mix | 19 | 17 |
| Average | 66 | 59 |
| Average/below average mix | 20 | 18 |
| Below average | 5 | 4 |

*Table A6 Proportion of ethnic minority pupils*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| None/very few | 100 | 89 |
| Under half | 10 | 9 |
| About half | 2 | 2 |

As a footnote to this section describing the schools from which our teacher sample was drawn, we might add that we attempted to feed in the headteachers' own descriptions of these schools, obtained from their questionnaires. This was not very successful, as the headteachers generally (unlike the teachers) answered this section of the questionnaire in a rather perfunctory way, leaving many gaps. Any cross-tabulation of school background as seen by the headteachers against replies to questions on discipline was therefore impossible.

## The teachers

For each of the 112 schools, from two to ten teachers were selected, in proportion to the overall staff numbers; 1,011 teacher names were targeted. The random selection of teachers was based on confidential superannuation lists available to SOED but not to us. The questionnaire was therefore posted out by SOED with a covering letter from the Statistics Division but asking for a return to us at SCRE. This did not seem to cause undue confusion. The teachers were given the option of an anonymous reply but reminded that a signed reply would allow them to be crossed off the list for reminder letters. Most respondents signed their replies; only 7% of the total remained anonymous. We received replies from each of the 112 schools, from 883 teachers. This was a return rate of 87%, astonishingly high and indicative of the interest in the topic of discipline. Besides describing the context of their schools, the teachers told us something about their own personal and career background.

We present this information in Tables A7 to A13, to give readers an overall picture of our respondents. Please note that for most of the tables there is a varying number of missing cases.

*Table A7 Gender*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 415 | 47 |
| Male | 468 | 53 |

*Table A8 Age*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 34 and under | 180 | 20 |
| 35-44 years | 413 | 47 |
| 45 and over | 287 | 33 |

*Table A9 Years in teaching*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 5 and under | 56 | 6 |
| 6-10 years | 161 | 18 |
| 11-15 years | 228 | 26 |
| 16-20 years | 232 | 27 |
| 21-25 years | 104 | 12 |
| 26-30 years | 64 | 7 |
| 31 and over | 38 | 3 |

*Table A10 Years in present school*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| under 1 year | 32 | 4 |
| 1 year | 69 | 8 |
| 2-5 years | 200 | 24 |
| 6-10 years | 216 | 26 |
| 11-15 years | 172 | 20 |
| 16-20 years | 110 | 13 |
| 21-25 years | 29 | 3 |
| 26-30 years | 11 | 1 |
| Over 30 years | 6 | 0.7 |

*Table A11 Experience in different schools*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Experience of one school | 177 | 21 |
| Experience of 2 or 3 schools | 455 | 54 |
| Experience of 4 or more schools | 213 | 25 |

*Table A12 Post held*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Non-promoted post | 360 | 41 |
| Senior teacher | 39 | 4 |
| APT | 111 | 13 |
| PT | 310 | 35 |
| AHT or depute head* | 61 | 7 |

*Headteachers were excluded from the sample

*Table A13 Proportion of time on class teaching*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Over 65% of time | 723 | 83 |
| 50-65% of time | 87 | 10 |
| Under 50% of time | 58 | 7 |

From these tables it can be seen that the majority of our teachers were aged 35 or more, had more than five years' experience in teaching, had been in their present school for at least two years, had experience of two or three different schools and spent most of their time in class contact. We might speculate that this accumulated experience would give our teachers a basis on which to judge fairly the position in their schools. We should add that Table 12 shows the majority of our sample (59%) to hold some form of promoted post; this might have affected their view of discipline in the school overall.

It was also possible, as we suggested in the introduction, that taking teachers at random out of pre-selected schools may have given us a teacher sample different in some way from the teacher population in general. The SOED Statistics Division was able to check for us the general picture in relation to Tables 7, 8 and 12; that is gender, age and post held. The information given in the other tables was not information also held on record by the SOED. For gender and age, our sample contained marginally more females than the overall teaching population, and rather fewer teachers aged 34 and under. However, on examination of various

cross-tabulations, neither of these groups appeared to have views distinctively different from their colleagues in any case. In terms of post held, our sample contained rather more principal teachers and fewer teachers in non-promoted posts than the overall population. We had about 6-7% of our sample 'misplaced' from non-promoted into the promoted posts. The possible effect of this could have been to give a more positive bias to the replies. These different groups could be identified, however, and if necessary marked out in some way.

## The headteachers

All secondary schools in Scotland were sent a headteacher questionnaire. This included a small number of mixed primary/secondary schools, usually in isolated regions. The return rate overall was a very high 90%; 386 out of 431 headteachers sent in replies. There was no specific regional or geographical basis to the missing schools. As with the teachers, we asked the headteachers some questions about their personal and career background. This information is presented in Tables 14 to 20. These tables cover approximately the same areas as did Tables 7 to 13 for the teachers, but the categories within the tables differ in some cases. This reflects the different age patterns and career situations of the headteachers. Please note also that for most of the these tables there is a varying number of missing cases.

*Table A14 Gender*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 9 | 2 |
| Male | 370 | 98 |

*Table A15 Age*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 44 and under | 92 | 24 |
| 45-55 | 201 | 52 |
| Over 55 | 92 | 24 |

*Table A16 Years in teaching*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 15 and under | 6 | 2 |
| 16-20 | 70 | 18 |
| 21-25 | 101 | 27 |
| 26-30 | 103 | 27 |
| 31 and over | 101 | 27 |

*Table A17 Years in post*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 year and under | 60 | 16 |
| 2-5 years | 113 | 30 |
| 6-10 years | 92 | 24 |
| 11-15 years | 63 | 17 |
| 16-20 years | 37 | 10 |
| 21 and over | 11 | 3 |

*Table A18 Experience in different schools*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| No previous headteacher post | 300 | 78 |
| Previously HT in one school | 74 | 19 |
| Previously HT in two/more schools | 9 | 3 |

***Table A19** Proportion of time on class course*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Over 10% of the time | 44 | 12 |
| 5-10% of the time | 46 | 12 |
| Under 5% of the time | 58 | 15 |
| No teaching time | 233 | 61 |

***Table A20** Relevant in-service experience/ training*

| Category | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Regional course | 36 | 9 |
| Other | 15 | 4 |
| Both regional and other | 3 | 0.8 |
| None | 328 | 86 |

From the above tables it can be seen that headteachers were male, were over 45 and had more than 20 years experience in teaching. Almost half of the group had only been in post for up to five years, which seems to indicate some degree of change in the profession. The vast majority had had no previous headteacher experience, nor had they been given any training relevant to dealing with school discipline since they took up their posts. Fully six out of ten headteachers had no class contact. We should add that a small percentage of headteachers emphasised in their open responses their personal distance from incidents of indiscipline in the classroom, due to a good referral system or an efficient 'hatchet man'. Another small percentage emphasised their closeness to indiscipline around the school, due to what they saw as teacher distancing from out-of-class discipline. The majority of the headteachers seemed to have little difficulty in judging the seriousness of indiscipline in their schools, however.

## Coding the replies to the free response

The free response section to the questionnaire was completed by 69% of the teachers and 58% of the headteachers. The quantity and quality of this material made it difficult to analyse. We selected a random sample of 50 teacher scripts and used these to generate a broad set of categories of data. This was done by three researchers initially working independently then discussing and refining the categories. The categories thus generated were tested out by applying the coding frame to a fresh set of scripts. This threw up new problems, leading to further discussion and refinement. This whole process was carried out several times, with the categories expanding to take in detail then collapsing again into broader groups. We ended up with twelve fairly broad categories into which we could fit the kinds of things the teachers wrote.

When we came to analyse the headteacher data, we were starting off with some ideas in mind. Nevertheless, we did not wish to impose a framework which did not fit this possibly different set of data. A different researcher tackled the initial categorisation before involving the research team; we hoped in this way to get a fresh view of the material. In fact, many categories were the same as those identified from the teacher data, while others were similar but differently labelled. We carried out the same refining process as we had with the creation of categories for the teacher data, but stopped while we still had rather a high number of categories, 26 in all. This gave us a detailed picture of the response, too detailed, perhaps. Many of the categories had only a small percentage of headteachers making that particular point. Given the content of the headteacher categories it seemed sensible to collapse them in a pattern approximating that of the teacher coding. This gave us a means of comparing the views of the two groups. We felt that little damage was done to the headteacher data in collapsing

the categories in this way, as some were already the same, while others were detailed variants on a category already in the teacher coding. It seemed important to try to offer a comparable reading of the teacher and headteacher response, if this was possible without doing violence to the data.

As a final point, we should note that some of the free response consisted of comment on the questionnaire itself. This included additional clarification of answers to earlier parts of the questionnaire, and complaints or compliments about the questionnaire itself. There were more clarification points given than compliments or complaints. These issues were raised by 9% of the teachers and 18% of the headteachers.

## Summary

There were two different samples involved in completing two different but allied questionnaires. The teacher sample was randomly chosen out of 1 in 4 Scottish secondary schools. The schools themselves were chosen to fit into the national framework on three dimensions; size, proportions of pupils eligible for free meals, and denominational or non-denominational status. The 883 teachers who completed the questionnaire (an 87% return rate) were slightly unrepresentative of Scottish teachers, in that there were more promoted staff, slightly more women and slightly fewer younger teachers. Only the promoted/non-promoted variable appeared to affect teacher replies. The headteacher sample was the entire population of Scottish secondary school headteachers. The return rate of questionnaires was 90%, and there seemed to be no particular bias to the missing 10%. The sample itself was predominantly male, older, and with more teaching experience.

## The questionnaires

The two questionnaires used in this survey are available on request from the Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR.

*The Scottish Council for Research in Education*

The survey reported here was a major component in a large-scale research project entitled **Discipline in Scottish Schools** (reference H/1/10) carried out by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, under contract from the Scottish Office Education Department, between October 1987 and January 1991. The focus of the research study was on what counts as good discipline and what makes it effective. The survey, conducted in 1990, involved a sample of 1000 teachers in 112 schools and all secondary school headteachers in Scotland. Both teachers and headteachers were asked about the nature and extent of indiscipline. Headteachers were also asked about policy concerns and management systems and teachers about particularly difficult pupils and classes. Since the teacher questions followed the pattern set by Gray and Sime for the Elton Committee, it was possible also to compare the views of Scottish teachers with those in England and Wales. Large numbers of teachers and headteachers took the chance in the open section of the questionnaire to give their views on positive as well as negative aspects of discipline. Quotations from these free responses are used for illustration throughout the report.

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